

# "Miracle on South Division Street"

A Comedy  
by  
Tom Dudzick

PARADIGM AGENCY  
Jack Tantleff  
360 Park Ave. South  
NYC 10010  
212-897-6400

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## CHARACTERS

The Nowak Family

CLARA, late 60s

Her Children, in their 30's:

BEVERLY, the eldest

RUTH, the middle child

JIMMY, the baby

## SETTING

Clara Nowak's kitchen, in a run-down working class neighborhood of Buffalo, NY. Early Autumn, 2010.

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NOTE: This play is performed without an intermission. However, if an intermission is desired, instructions for placement appear on the last page.

NOTE: A "Holiday Version" of this script is available, customized for the Christmas/Holiday season.



"MIRACLE ON SOUTH DIVISION STREET"

(Early Autumn, 2010. The home of Clara Nowak. Specifically, a kitchen in an old rundown house in the rundown "Hydraulics" section of Buffalo, New York. Hardly anyone lives around here anymore. Urban blight has settled in. This particular dwelling sits behind a neighborhood soup kitchen which used to be a barber shop.

(Most of the furnishings are very old. The kitchen fixtures and appliances haven't been updated in ages. This is not to imply that the place is dirty. On the contrary, it is quite clean. Clara is, after all, Polish.

(AT RISE: A very large soup kettle sits on the stove top. JIMMY NOWAK sits at the kitchen table with his toolbox. Jimmy is 30-ish and wears sloppy knock-around clothing. He is deep in concentration fixing the plug on an old toaster.

(Presently RUTH NOWAK, mid-30's, enters through the front door with a small grocery bag. Ruth is gangly, awkward and not the type men throw themselves at, but she has an appealing positive energy. At this moment, however, she is quite upset.)

JIMMY

Hi, Ruthie.

(Ruth puts bag down on table.)

What's the matter with you?

RUTH

I just saw Mrs. Waskolevitch, standing and crying in front of Kozlowski's Bakery.

JIMMY

Just standing and crying? About what?

RUTH

Because it was closed.

JIMMY

Oh, you mean she didn't know?

RUTH

She left her house to go buy some Kisiel, and there it was, "Out of Business." She's a wreck. Think of it. Her whole world is dying around her. Last year Benny Miller's Candy Store. Then the dry cleaners. Now the bakery. And you know what she said? She said, "It used to be such a pretty street. Now the only pretty thing left is your Grandpa's shrine." ...What's wrong with this city?

JIMMY

Hey, y'can't blame the city. It's all over. Have you seen Detroit on the news?

RUTH

I know.

JIMMY

Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, same thing. Everybody's escaping to the suburbs.

(Looking through grocery bag.)

Ray Madjykowski called me after he took that job in Cleveland. He said if he wanted urban blight he coulda stayed home and saved the airfare. Hey, where's the gefilte fish?

RUTH

The what?

JIMMY

Didn't you get my message?

RUTH

No. I'm making fruit salad. You wanted fish?

JIMMY

Gefilte fish.

RUTH

What kind of fish is that?

JIMMY

It comes in jars. You put it on crackers with horseradish.

RUTH  
Fish in a jar?

JIMMY  
Yeah, it's good.

RUTH  
Well, Reilly's isn't going to have fish in a jar. Fish sticks maybe. But I'm not going back. Where's Ma?

JIMMY  
Up in the attic.  
(Starts digging in his pocket.)  
Hey, Ruthie...

RUTH  
It's almost twelve; where's Beverly? If she blows off this meeting I'll kill her.

JIMMY  
Ruthie, here, before everybody gets here.  
(Comes up with a ring box.)  
Check it out.  
(Opens box.)

RUTH  
[Gasp!] Jimmy!  
(Takes box and holds it very close to her eyes.)

JIMMY  
Keep lookin', it's there.

RUTH  
It's beautiful!

JIMMY  
Put in a lotta overtime on the garbage truck for that little baby.

RUTH  
Who is she?

JIMMY  
You don't know her. She lives on the North Side. She's beautiful, and she's got this red hair, and she's funnier n' shit. I'm dyin' for you to meet her. I'm gonna ask her tonight.

RUTH  
My baby brother! Congratulations! Have you told Ma?

JIMMY  
No, not yet, it's, uh... I'm not sure how she'll go for it.

RUTH  
Go for it? Are you kidding? Grandkids? She'll love it!

JIMMY  
I don't know...  
(Pockets the ring.)

RUTH  
You don't know? Why, is something wrong with her? Has she got two heads, three boobs, what?

JIMMY  
No, nothin's wrong with her. She's great.

RUTH  
Then tell Ma! ...Except do me a favor. Wait until after my meeting, okay?

JIMMY  
Ruth, this meeting. I think I know what it's about.

RUTH  
It's about the statue. Didn't I say that on my message?

JIMMY  
It ain't about the statue. And Ma knows, too.

RUTH  
What are you talking about?

JIMMY  
She knows you been skippin' mass.

RUTH  
(Her face falls.)  
What?

JIMMY  
Yeah.

RUTH  
How do you know? Did she say something?

Uh-huh. JIMMY

Wha'd she say? RUTH

Said Ruthie's been skippin' mass. JIMMY

Damn! How did she find out? RUTH

Mrs. Schmidt and her radar. JIMMY

Oh, that old busy-body! Shit! RUTH

But I don't know why you're making so much of it. Skippin' mass, so what? Y'think I don't skip? Y'think I worry every time about what Ma's gonna say? JIMMY

Jimmy, I don't just miss mass. I've quit mass. RUTH

Huh? Altogether? JIMMY  
(She nods.)  
Oh. ...Wow. ...Why'ja do that?

For lots of reasons. None of which I wanted to go into today. I was waiting for the right time to talk about it with her. Like, next year. RUTH

Wow. Quit mass. JIMMY

Now she's going to be all upset. Why'd this have to happen now? I planned it so carefully. Sit everybody down, nice and calm, give them the nice fruit salad... RUTH

So, that's not what your meeting's about. JIMMY

(Exasperated.)  
Have you been listening? RUTH

JIMMY

(Mystery solved.)  
[Gasp!] Holy shit!

RUTH

What?

JIMMY

It's about you. The meeting's about you. You're gonna tell Ma. Finally.

RUTH

Huh?!

JIMMY

About... y'know, you and -- You're gonna tell her. Thank God, it's about time. No more lying.

RUTH

(Glares at him.)  
Are you on this world?

JIMMY

What?

RUTH

My meeting is about the statue.

JIMMY

Y'mean it really is about the statue?  
(She gestures a sarcastic YES!)  
Well, that's a letdown.

(Now CLARA NOWAK, late 60's, enters from the other room wearing an old housedress. Born in Poland, Clara was brought over to the USA while still an infant and was raised in the thick of this all-Polish neighborhood. Having had very little schooling, she seems to still have one foot stuck in "the old country." There is a charmingly naive Old World Peasant air about her.)

CLARA

(Fanning herself with an envelope, she moves to fridge.)  
Whew, it's hot up there! If Hell is anything like our attic, I don't wanna go near the place.

(From this point on, Ruth busies herself preparing a fruit salad.)

RUTH

Hi, Ma.

CLARA

Oh... hello, Ruthie.

(To Jimmy.)

To me, Hell would be sittin' in that attic, bein' forced to read some real boring book or somethin', like Moby Dick.

(Jimmy chuckles.)

Readin' it out loud. The whole book. With your hands tied behind your back and you have to turn the pages with your nose. That's hell.

(Jimmy chuckles some more. He gets a kick out of his mother.)

And if you miss a page, you gotta go all the way back to the beginning. And the devil's standin' right there with his pitchfork, and if you dispronounce a word he gives you a jab right in the dupa. And if you ask for a drink of water--

RUTH

Ma, why are you talking about hell?

CLARA

'Cause I was in the attic.

RUTH

Oh, of course.

CLARA

And it's good to be reminded sometimes what's in store for ya' if you goof up here on Earth.

JIMMY

That's why you went up there?

CLARA

No, whattaya think, I'm a nitwit? I was lookin' for this.  
(The envelope.)

JIMMY

What's that?

CLARA

Later. How's my toaster comin'?

JIMMY

It's comin'. And when the heck are you gonna get a new one?

CLARA

New one? Why?

JIMMY

It's so old. There's crumbs in here from Grandma's toast.

CLARA

So? I'm old, you gonna throw me out?

JIMMY

No. 'Cause you still make good kolaczki. Once that stops, though, it's off to the dump with ya'.

CLARA

(To Ruth.)

What's all this?

RUTH

Makin' a fruit salad.

CLARA

For what?

RUTH

For what. For eating. I can't ask you all to my meeting and then not feed you, can I?

CLARA

Your meeting, huh? Well, before you commence with your meeting, dearie, I'm gonna have one of my own. Right now, with the both of you. 'Cause things have come to a point around here where they just can't go on.

RUTH

What are you talking about?

CLARA

I'm talking about the way you two have been giving that statue speech lately. I've been listening and you're boring the pants off people!

JIMMY

Boring them?

CLARA

Yes! You, last weekend, cleaning the plate glass window, I heard ya'. Those people pulled up asking you for directions? Perfect opportunity to inspire them with our story. But this is what I hear through my window --

(A dreary monotone.)

"This is a statue of the Blessed Mother, built by my grandfather in 1943. He was a kindly old barber." ...Sheesh! Did they stay and listen?

(MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

They left skid marks they drove off so fast.

(To Ruth.)

You, you're no better. Y'sound like Robbie the Robot out there.

(Another mechanical delivery.)

"It used to be a barbershop but now it's a soup kitchen." I've seen the people, their eyes roll back in their heads. Now, we gotta get things back on track here or the miracle's gonna die on us. So, get up and let's hear the speech right now.

(To Jimmy.)

You start.

JIMMY

I ain't startin'.

CLARA

(To Ruth.)

Alright, you then, let's go, up and at 'em.

RUTH

Ma, no, I don't want to do this.

CLARA

You care so much about the statue.

RUTH

Yes, I care.

CLARA

Well?

RUTH

But-- that's not why I'm here today, Ma. Please.

CLARA

(To Jimmy.)

Alright, you, let's hear it.

JIMMY

Ma, whattaya want from me? I been sayin' that speech the same way I been sayin' it since I learned how to talk.

CLARA

And it sounds it! You gotta pep it up, boy. I can't keep this alive all by myself and I ain't gonna live forever. ...So?

JIMMY

(With a long sigh of resignation, he begins,  
with a rather uninspired delivery.)  
This is a statue of the Blessed --

CLARA

Stand up.

JIMMY

Awww--

CLARA

Up! Get in the spirit of it.  
(He stands.)

Okay, there you are. Picture it. In the sacred presence of  
our shrine. Twenty feet high. Majestic. Along comes a  
stranger. ...You're on!

JIMMY

(Rolls his eyes and begins.)  
This is a statue of the Blessed Mother, built by my  
grandfather in 1943. He was a kindly old barber. See that  
soup kitchen? It used to be his barbershop. We all lived  
behind it. In fact, his daughter Clara still does. Now  
she's turned the barbershop into a soup kitchen, giving soup  
to the poor and needy every Sunday from twelve to five-  
thirty.

(Off her blank stare.)  
You don't like it.

CLARA

If I was an insomniac I'd love it.

JIMMY

What's the matter with it?

CLARA

It's got no pizzazz.

JIMMY

Where am I supposed to get pizzazz? I'm no actor.

CLARA

You don't gotta be an actor. Just pep it up. Make it  
exciting for the poor soul listenin' to ya'. He never heard  
a story this exciting in his life. Go ahead, twelve to five-  
thirty.

JIMMY

(An overdone attempt at acting.)  
Every Sunday from twelve to five-thir--  
(MORE)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(Feeling ridiculous, he stops. Proceeds with a smidge of gusto.)

And the reason the statue is here is because one night the Blessed Mother herself appeared to my grandfather. Right in his shop. And she --

CLARA

(With theatrical gestures.)

The Blessed Mother appeared to my grandfather. Appeared to my grandfather.

JIMMY

C'mon, I can't do that!

RUTH

He doesn't have to go that far, Ma.

CLARA

Well, okay, but give it somethin'. Appeared right in his shop, go ahead.

JIMMY

She appeared right in his shop.

(Continues with an awkward attempt at theatrics.)

And she gave him her message of peace for the world, that all the nations should lay down their arms and stop the fighting. ...I dunno, if I saw me doin' that I'd call the men in the white coats.

CLARA

You're thinkin' about it too much. All you gotta remember is that this was a miracle. That's what you wanna get across to the poor slob listenin'. A miracle! The Blessed Mother appeared. Not the mailman. Not Mrs. Schmidt sellin' raffle tickets. The Blessed Virgin Mary.

JIMMY

Yeah, I know, but...

CLARA

Ruthie, willya show him? Do the part with the miraculous healings. The rashes that cleared up, the sore throats, the heartburn.

RUTH

(With quiet command.)

Ma... no. This is not why I came here today.

(A tense moment.)

May I please have some napkins?

CLARA

Well!

(Goes to cupboard, gets napkins. To herself.)

Not why she came here. Got her own meeting.

(Puts napkins on table.)

Shells out for cheese and pepperoni. Must be bad news.

(Looks at price sticker on cheese.)

Six-ninety-nine! Whadja do, wreck the car?!

JIMMY

(He's been looking at Clara's envelope on the table.)

Ma, what is this?

(Reads.)

"His Holiness Pope Pius the 12th. Vatican. Rome. Italy. Europe." Is it a joke?

CLARA

(Takes it.)

Careful with that.

JIMMY

What is it?

CLARA

My letter I wrote to the Pope.

JIMMY

You wrote to the Pope!?

CLARA

Uh-huh.

JIMMY

The actual Pope? How wild is that? When did you write it?

CLARA

When I was a kid.

JIMMY

Did he write back?

CLARA

Nah. Never even opened the damn thing. Sent it back "Postage Due," lookit that.

RUTH

(Looks closely at envelope.)

Well, Ma, a five cent stamp!

CLARA

What, His Holiness couldn't cough up a coupla nickels for the mailman?

(Attaches letter to fridge with a magnet.)

JIMMY

How old were you?

CLARA

I dunno, ten.

JIMMY

What did you write about?

CLARA

Well... I'm not sure I wanna say. Here and now.

JIMMY

Why not?

CLARA

I'm not sure everybody here would be interested... since it's of a religious nature.

RUTH

What's that supposed to mean?

CLARA

You know what it means.

RUTH

No, I don't know what it means, what does it mean?

CLARA

Well, y'know... you don't go to mass no more. Why would you be interested in what me and the Pope had to say?

RUTH

I go to mass.

CLARA

It's okay, you don't have to lie.

RUTH

I'm not lying.

CLARA

Mrs. Schmidt saw you, sweetie.

RUTH

She saw me there?

CLARA

No, she saw you not there. She can see your door right from her window and she says you never left your apartment.

RUTH

That's because I don't go to the eleven anymore, I go to the seven. I like getting up early.

CLARA

Mmm. But she got up early, too, last Sunday, and says you never went to the seven.

RUTH

Except for last Sunday, that's right, I overslept, I went to the nine.

CLARA

She never seen you leave.

JIMMY

Maybe Ruth slipped out when Mrs. Schmidt went to the bathroom.

RUTH

Ma--

JIMMY

Or does she keep a jar by the window?

RUTH

Ma, I don't know what Mrs. Schmidt saw, but I was at the nine.

CLARA

Funny, so was I.

RUTH

You were at the nine?

CLARA

Uh-huh. Where were you?

RUTH

I sat in the back.

CLARA

Why didn't you come sit with me?

RUTH

I had a cold, I didn't want you to catch it.

CLARA

But you saw me?

RUTH

Sure.

CLARA

I wasn't at the nine!

JIMMY

Jeez, Ma, you oughta open a detective agency.

CLARA

Skippin' mass!

JIMMY

Nowak & Schmidt.

CLARA

Now that's somethin' to have a meeting about. That's a mortal sin.

RUTH

(Aside to Jimmy.)  
Did I tell you?

CLARA

That's straight to hell, and I don't mean the attic. For eternity. And now lyin' about it? That's 8 weeks extra, minimum!

RUTH

Ma! Jesus never mentioned mass. He said, "Love thy neighbor, do unto others," but he never said, "And you have to go to mass every Sunday." Never.

CLARA

Well, somebody said it, Missy. 'Cause it's a rule. And the Nowaks don't play free and loose with the rules. No ma'm, not us. That's other families.

RUTH

[Groan!]

CLARA

You can [Groan!] all you want, but you know as well as I do, we were selected special.

(MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

Now whatever's goin' on in that noggin o' yours, you better go to confession on Saturday and straighten it out. And then get yourself back to mass on Sundays. No more nonsense.

RUTH

Please, can you let me just focus on my meeting?

JIMMY

Let her focus on her meeting.

CLARA

Are you startin', too?

JIMMY

(Taking envelope from fridge.)  
Come on, I wanna know what a ten-year-old wrote to the Pope about.

CLARA

Read it if you gotta know so bad.

JIMMY

(Opens letter and reads.)  
"Dear Your Holiness... My father is an honest man. If he says the Blessed Mother showed up at his barbershop, then she did."

(To Clara.)

You wrote him about the Miracle?

CLARA

Darn tootin'.

JIMMY

Wow!

CLARA

I wanted him to know about it. Know that it was on the level. And that Papa wasn't just some screwball like some people were saying.

JIMMY

(Reads.)  
"...she performs miracles like on Mrs. Cavanaugh's foot and the nice people here are even calling her "Our Lady of South Division Street."

CLARA

Doesn't even open it. Boy, that made me mad.

RUTH

Well, sure, after layin' out the dough for that stamp.

CLARA

Then those almighty nuns of yours. That was the icing on the cake. Telling all your little friends stories about--

(Meaning herself:)

-- "that barber's daughter"... and not to pray to that statue 'cause it was a phony. When I heard that I marched into that Church so fast, never even got my apron off. I found that Father Fitzroy and told him, listen, enough is enough. The Church has got to admit that this miracle is a miracle.

RUTH

What did he say?

CLARA

Said, "I'll admit no such thing." He said Papa did not have an official vision. Said he just had a dream. And if I kept on about it he'd call the Diocese and have the statue taken down.

JIMMY

Wow. Could they do that?

CLARA

With God behind 'em? I guess they can do whatever the hell they want.

JIMMY

(Re: the letter.)

So, what's your plan? Gonna send this back to Vatican Italy Europe?

CLARA

No, thank you. I learned my lesson. This time it's gonna go through the proper channels. And Bev's gonna help me with that part, 'cept she don't know it yet.

RUTH

Bev? What can she do?

CLARA

She's datin' an ex-priest.

RUTH

She's what?

JIMMY

Ex?

Our Bev?  
RUTH

(Clara nods.)

JIMMY  
What did he do to get ex'd?

CLARA  
Don't ask me. "Ex." That's all I know. But he's the guy; he's gonna know all the ins and outs, where to send my letter.

RUTH  
Ma, why are you digging this all up again?

JIMMY  
Yeah, Ma, you mailed this in nineteen--  
(Squints at postmark.)  
--fifty-two.

CLARA  
Well... I saw Dr. Keating a couple weeks ago.

RUTH  
Are you alright?

CLARA  
Yeah, just a checkup. He said I was very healthy. But it was the way he said it.

RUTH  
What did he say?

CLARA  
He says, "For a woman your age."

JIMMY  
But you are a woman your age.

CLARA  
Yeah, but it bothered me. Made me think for the first time about dying.

JIMMY  
Ma--!

CLARA

And about my promise to Papa that I never kept. Kids, before I die I'm gonna see to it that the Church does what it shoulda done sixty years ago. Put their Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval on the miracle. Whattaya think?

JIMMY

(Shrugs.)  
If it's what you wanna do.

CLARA

It is. But I need help writin' a letter. This one's no good, it's a little kid's letter. I need a grownup one.

JIMMY

Writing, well, that's Ruthie's department. Writin' a whole book, she can help you write a letter.

CLARA

(Turns to Ruth.)  
Ruthie? I'm sorry I blew up about mass.

RUTH

That's okay, Ma. We can talk about it sometime.

CLARA

Sure. And maybe you could take time from your book to help me?

RUTH

Ma... after my meeting I will be happy to help you with anything in the world.

CLARA

Good-good-good. Thank you.

JIMMY

(Picks up toaster.)  
Okay, Ma, here, all fixed. Now, please, pull it out by the plug, not by the cord. By the plug.

CLARA

I know, I know.

JIMMY

You know but you keep doin' it.

CLARA

I been makin' toast since before you were born, don't tell me. Gimme.

JIMMY

(Holds it back from her.)  
What do I get for it?

CLARA

Slice o' Babka?

JIMMY

Mmm--!

CLARA

(Takes toaster.)  
After lunch.

RUTH

Babka? Where'd you get Babka? Not Kozlowski's.

CLARA

No, Bev and me made it the other night. Y'know, Bev was sayin', with Kozlowski's gone, I now make the best pastries in the neighborhood.

RUTH

You always made the best.

JIMMY

No contest.

CLARA

I know. I just like to hear you say it. You shoulda been here, Ruthie. We had such fun, bakin' together like the old days. I called ya'. At the library again? Writin' your book?

(Ruth's cellphone rings.)

RUTH

(Gets phone.)  
No, actually, seeing a play with -- speak of the devil.  
(Into phone.)  
Hi, Lucy. Tonight? Sure, that'd be great. Oh, I don't know, you pick something. Okay, bye.

CLARA

You and those plays.

JIMMY

What's Lucy doin' back?

CLARA

Yeah, I thought she hated Buffalo.

RUTH

She's visiting her Mom and she doesn't hate Buffalo.

CLARA

Called it dead.

RUTH

She was just in one of her moods that day.

CLARA

If she doesn't hate it, why'd she move?

RUTH

She wanted something different, okay? Jeez, people are allowed to move.

CLARA

Did all her dreams come true down there in glamorous New York City?

RUTH

No, but she loves it.

CLARA

Does, huh?

RUTH

Sure, why not? It's great.

CLARA

What's so great?

RUTH

The energy.

CLARA

Energy? We ain't got energy here? How do you think I cooked that Babka, with a match?

RUTH

I mean a different kind of energy. Like in the air. Things happen faster there.

CLARA

Sure, people runnin' around like lunatics, I know.

RUTH

You'd have to feel it for yourself. It's different. George Lewandowki is down there now. He's in computers. He's--

JIMMY

Gorgeous George?!

CLARA

"Gorgeous George" Lewandowski! Wooh! Did he have a thing for you!

JIMMY

"Rooooothie! Come on out and play!

RUTH

I only mention it because he's doing very well.

CLARA

And I suppose you're thinkin' of movin' now.

RUTH

Doesn't hurt to think.

(Jimmy yawns noisily.)

CLARA

Are we keeping you up?

JIMMY

Sorry. Up late watchin' "The Ten Commandments." Jeez, that's a long movie.

CLARA

(With distaste.)

"The Ten Commandments?" What was that doing on, that's an Easter movie.

RUTH

(Patiently.)

Ma... Jews escaping from the Pharoah? An Easter movie?

CLARA

It's on at Easter.

RUTH

(To Jimmy.)

You explain it.

JIMMY

Ma, it's a Passover movie.

CLARA

A what?

JIMMY

A Passover movie. You know what Passover is.

CLARA

I heard of it.

JIMMY

Well, that's what it's about.

CLARA

And last night was the Passover?

JIMMY

No, the Passover is around the Easter.

CLARA

Then what was it doin' on in October?

JIMMY

It wasn't on, I rented it.

CLARA

You watched it on purpose? Yeesh! See, that's what they'd make you watch up in the attic if it was hell.

JIMMY

I like it. I like learnin' about different people and their ways.

CLARA

All I remember is the chariot race.

JIMMY

That's "Ben Hur." Ma, anything else need fixin' before I put the tools away?

CLARA

Yeah, that vacuum cleaner.

(He rises and from a corner produces a very old Electro Lux cannister vacuum cleaner.)

Same thing, the plug comes off. What's the matter with these crappy products?

JIMMY

(Staring at the relic.)

I don't know, let's write a letter to Thomas Edison.

CLARA

Oh, and that mail slot in the shrine needs oil. Hard to open and stick coins in there.

JIMMY

(Sitting with vacuum.)  
Who still puts coins in there?

CLARA

People with coins.

RUTH

How about notes? They still leave notes asking for miracles?

CLARA

You betcha. Sometimes even from the suburbs they come. Back to the old neighborhood. 'Cause they remember.

JIMMY

(Remembering.)  
"Dear Blessed Virgin Mary... my husband lost his job... my grand-daughter's got pneumonia... please send us a miracle."

CLARA

Then "clink!"  
(Dropping in a coin.)

RUTH

How much is in that bank account now?

CLARA

None of your business.

JIMMY

I could use some new snow tires.

CLARA

Keep dreamin'.

RUTH

What are you going to do with the money, Ma? Can't let it just sit there.

CLARA

Can if I want. Those coins were given in good faith.

RUTH

Y'sure it isn't people trying to buy a miracle?

CLARA

Hey, do I tell 'em to stick money in the slot? That's their own idea.

RUTH

So what are you going to do with it?

CLARA

I don't know yet, shut up you two about the money. You ain't gettin' it, that's all you gotta know.

JIMMY

Alright, alright.

CLARA

Buy your own snow tires.

JIMMY

Alright.

CLARA

(Looks at clock.)  
Where is that girl?

RUTH

I know, "Waiting for Godot" was easier.

CLARA

Who?

RUTH

It's a play.

JIMMY

Hey, didn't you have an audition last week? How'd it go?

RUTH

Didn't get the part.

CLARA

Just as well.

RUTH

What does that mean?

CLARA

Well, a dirty show like that.

Dirty? JIMMY

It's not dirty. RUTH

It's not dirty? CLARA

No, it's not. RUTH

With a name like that? CLARA

What's it called? JIMMY

Not in this house, Mister. CLARA

"Not in This House, Mister?" What's dirty about that? JIMMY

No, no. CLARA  
(To Ruth.)  
Look, Missy, I been around the block. You think we didn't have dirty shows in my day? Downtown at the Palace Burlesque, you bet we had 'em. So don't tell me.

Ma-- RUTH

But they gave the shows clean names back then. Or maybe just a little racy. "Everybody's Girl." "Hollywood Peepshow." "The Striptease Murder Case." Y'know, cute! But this! I never heard such filth in my life. CLARA

Ma, audiences and critics worldwide have called "The Vagina Monologues"-- RUTH

(Covers her ears.) CLARA  
Naaaaaah--!

For God's sake. RUTH

JIMMY

Ha-ha-ha --

CLARA

(To Jimmy.)

Stop that!

(To Ruth.)

That name! How can you be in it, I can't even say it! I wouldn't be able to order tickets over the phone! ...Monologue, that means talking, right? What is it, like a puppet show? Don't tell me!

RUTH

Look, I didn't get the part, so you don't have to worry about it. Hey, how about we just don't talk about anything until my meeting's over, huh? Could we do that?

CLARA

Meeting, meeting! I wish you'd cut out the mystery and just tell me what it's about.

RUTH

I said no, not until Bev gets here.

CLARA

It's about the statue.

RUTH

Yes.

CLARA

Listen, missy, if you're thinkin' of movin' that statue, or sellin' that statue, or touchin' that statue --

RUTH

(Shouts.)

Can I get this lunch fixed without an effing argument?!

CLARA

You watch your initials, young lady!

JIMMY

Come on, you two, willya?

CLARA

Thinks I don't know what that F stands for. I been around the block!

JIMMY

Ma, let's help her with the lunch, come on. Here, you cut this, I'll put out the pepperoni.

(A tense moment. Clara grabs the brick of cheese. Through this next she finds a knife and starts slicing it.)

CLARA

(To herself.)  
Meeting. Big meeting. Had a meeting that time you wanted us to move, too. I'll never forget it. Move to a nice house in Orchard Park, she says. Take the statue with us, she says. Put it in the backyard.

JIMMY

That's still not a bad idea.

CLARA

What?!

JIMMY

I'm just sayin' --

CLARA

Oh, moving's a great idea! Give up on the neighborhood, that's a top notch idea.

JIMMY

Ma, have you looked at this neighborhood lately? Lucy was right. It practically is dead.

CLARA

And now I should listen to Lucy. A girl who skips town at the first sign of trouble. Lucy's from Lackawanna, what does she know what it was like here once upon a time? Was she here when there was twenty businesses on a block? And families, and kids on bicycles, and dogs? I was here. And your father, he was born here, born right over there on Seymour Street.

JIMMY

This wouldn't be giving up, Ma, it would be facing reality.

CLARA

Then I guess it's time I reminded you, James Francis Nowak, of the reality of where the Blessed Mother appeared. It was not in Orchard Park or in Lackawanna. She appeared here. We live on holy ground. Like it says on my sign out there. "Our Lady's Miracle Soup. Prepared on Holy Ground." If I hung up that sign in Orchard Park I'd be lying!

RUTH

Ma, I didn't say move. My meeting has nothing to do with that.

CLARA

It's about the statue, I know. It's about losin' your faith. My own daughter.

RUTH

Ma--

CLARA

That damn Father Fitzroy.

(Blesses herself.)

Forgive me. But that's when the seed of doubt was planted. If you're doubting now, it's because of him.

JIMMY

Wasn't his fault. He said for a miracle you need proof.

CLARA

Proof? What kinda proof does he need, more than a good honest Catholic hair-cutter tellin' him what happened?

JIMMY

Probably needed pictures or somethin'.

CLARA

Pictures of what?

JIMMY

(Shrugs.)

...pictures of...

CLARA

Of what? Of a vision? How do you take a picture of a vision? Who's ready with a camera at a time like that? "Wait, hold it right there, Mother Mary, don't go away, I'm gonna go get the Polaroid!" Did they take pictures at Lourdes? Our Lady of Fatima, they got eight-by-tens of her? No, but they believed. So, what's the difference?

JIMMY

Maybe 'cause over there she appeared in a grotto and not a barbershop.

CLARA

Well, I'm sorry, this is America, we ain't got grottos. We got barbershops. And burger joints. Any grotto we ever had is a WalMart now. So?

(MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

So, Mary's a sensible woman, she takes what she can get. She sees a nice empty barbershop -- POOF! "Here I am!" ...I'll tell you what's the difference between us and Fatima.

RUTH

We know the difference, Ma.

CLARA

I'll tell you what it is.

JIMMY

At Fatima she appeared to three shepherd kids.

RUTH

The newspapers like stories about children.

CLARA

Wrong. What Fatima had was volume. Seven thousand people. Witnesses. Sittin' on a hillside watchin' the miracle of the sun bouncin' around in the sky. So the Church figures, seven thousand people seen the sun bouncin' around in the sky, they can't all be wacky. Must be somethin' to it.

JIMMY

And we're supposed to get seven thousand people? Nobody even drives down this street no more unless they're lost.

CLARA

I didn't say we need seven thousand people. What we need is a good letter to the proper channels. And meanwhile we keep the story alive.

(There is noise at the door and BEVERLY NOWAK lets herself in. Late 30's, dressed in a running suit and carrying a bowling ball bag.)

BEVERLY

Alright, I'm here, I'm here.

RUTH

Finally!!

BEVERLY

Tell me what you gotta tell me. I'm on a tight schedule, I got a lane reserved for twelve-thirty.

RUTH

You what?

CLARA

Beverly, listen, I wanna ask you somethin'.

BEVERLY

Ain't got time for questions, Ma, this one's got her stopwatch goin', got it timed right down to the last syllable.

CLARA

I know but this new boyfriend of yours...

JIMMY

Yeah, what happened there?

CLARA

I wanna know, does he got connections?

BEVERLY

Connections?

JIMMY

Hold it, I wanna know what happened to the body builder, Mr. America?

BEVERLY

None o' your bees wax.

CLARA

Whattaya think happened? She told him about the miracle and -- PHHTT! -- he's off to the races.

BEVERLY

That is not what happened.

RUTH

Wait a minute, what do you mean twelve-thirty?

JIMMY

(To Beverly.)

You dumbell, I told ya'. Don't tell these guys about the miracle right away. Let 'em get to know you first. They take ya' for a nut job.

BEVERLY

The day I take romantic advice from you!

RUTH

You've got people waiting for you?

JIMMY

"Hey, you're cute, fella, and the Blessed Mother appeared in our barber shop!"

BEVERLY

Can it, garbage man.

CLARA

Beverly, the new guy, the ex-priest --

BEVERLY

Almost priest, Ma. Gerard was an almost priest.

CLARA

Almost?

BEVERLY

This close to being ordained. This close. But, y'know, that old vow of celibacy.

(Clara stares.)

He admitted it, he likes girls too much to be a priest. I admire his honesty. And he didn't want to be one of those priests who fools around, he respects his religion too much. So he bowed out. This is the one, Ma. I can feel it. No more Catholic Singles Dot Com for me.

CLARA

Catholic Singles what?

JIMMY

You met him on-line?

BEVERLY

No, I met this one the reliable way, in a bar.

CLARA

Grandkids!

BEVERLY

Yeah, if my biological clock ain't busted a mainspring.

RUTH

That's great, Bev, but what do you mean you've got people wai-

BEVERLY

(Overlapping.)

Oh, and Ma, I told him about Grampa's miracle. He went nuts. He's dying to see the statue. Dyin' to see "Clara's Soup Kitchen" and try your miracle soup.

(MORE)

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

And he says --get this-- he says instead of givin' it away to your homeless, you could be sellin' this stuff.

CLARA

Sell it, naah --

BEVERLY

Yeah, he says "Prepared on Holy Ground" is an even better slogan than "Mm-mm-Good!"

(Sees soup kettle on stove.)

Is this for tomorrow? What kind?

CLARA

Ox-tail.

BEVERLY

(Sniffs soup.)

Mmm... He's got a bald spot, maybe this'll fill it in -- ha ha!

JIMMY

(Putting vacuum cleaner away.)

All fixed.

CLARA

Thank you, boy genius.

BEVERLY

(Snapping fingers at Ruth.)

Alright, you, whattaya wanna tell me? Come on, I got things doin'.

RUTH

What? No! I said a meeting. Meeting. Where you sit and talk. I'm not going to rush through this.

BEVERLY

Oh, come on, I'm here. Just tell me.

RUTH

No!

BEVERLY

I can't hang around. There's a tournament tonight.

RUTH

It's not the way I wanted to do it.

BEVERLY

We gotta get in a practice game.

RUTH

...Y'know what? Fine. Fine.

(Starts gathering up the snacks.)

We'll do it later. When it's convenient for Bev. I didn't think it was asking too much to set aside an hour of your time. But, that's okay, we'll make the adjustment. So, later today, guys? Five, six, seven? Jimmy, are you free at seven?

JIMMY

Cheap, not free.

(Bev starts dialing her cell phone.)

RUTH

Ma, are you free at seven o'clock?

CLARA

No, I'm gonna go baptize some pagan babies. ...'Course I'm free, where'm I goin'?

RUTH

Fine. Y'know, I don't ask favors that often, only when I really need people.

BEVERLY

(With a great heaving sigh of martyrdom, she speaks into her phone.)

Go 'head, practice without me. Never mind, just go.

(Snaps phone closed and pockets it.)

Alright, what? What? The statue, is it going somewhere? Is it melting like the Wicked Witch? Does the Vatican want it for their front porch? What?

RUTH

Why don't you have a seat?

BEVERLY

(Looks.)

In the morning cheese and pepperoni?

RUTH

It's noon.

BEVERLY

Still. A little rich.

CLARA

Oh, sit down, Bev, have some fruit.

BEVERLY  
[Sigh] Sure, why not?

RUTH  
Fine. Okay. Now that we're all here.

BEVERLY  
Yeah, even Casanova.

JIMMY  
'Scuse me?

BEVERLY  
There he is, folks, the Casanova of Reckio's Bowling Center.

JIMMY  
Hello to you, too.

RUTH  
Okay...

BEVERLY  
(To Jimmy.)  
How's it goin', lover boy?

JIMMY  
Goin' okay.

BEVERLY  
The liberal lover boy.

RUTH  
I'd like to get started, alright?

BEVERLY  
Funny, he's your brother, you think you know him.

JIMMY  
Is there a problem, sister dear?

BEVERLY  
Problem? No, I got no problem.

JIMMY  
Good.

BEVERLY  
Me personally, as an individual, I got no problem.

JIMMY

Wonderful.

RUTH

Okay. We're all here. So, you're probably all wondering why I --

BEVERLY

But when you take in the whole family portrait, with me bein' part of that portrait, well then, on second thought, maybe I do got a problem. Yeah, I would say definitely, I got a problem.

CLARA

You're tirin' me out.

JIMMY

(To Beverly.)

They why don't you tell us about your problem, Bev? Share.

RUTH

Guys...

BEVERLY

Alright, thank you, Jimmy. Well, gang, it's like this. Seein' that God picked our family out of millions of other families to give a miracle to... to me that says God thinks pretty highly of the Nowaks. And I feel that if I were to do anything to offend Him, like breakin' one of His laws, well, I could see how that would reflect on the whole family. Maybe get Him mad at all of us. I mean, goin' by the way He worked in the Old Testament, I could see Him dealin' out some punishment to every Nowak, innocent as well as guilty.

CLARA

Oh my God, Beverly, what did you do?

BEVERLY

...Ma, last night, as I'm sittin' with a celebratory beer over at Applebee's, after leadin' our team to victory, what to my surprise does Joyce Parchetta whisper to me but, "Hey, Bev... is your brother dating Rachel Silverstein?"

(Clara slowly turns to Jimmy.)

CLARA

Silverstein? Silverstein? A Jewish girl? Are you outa your mind?

JIMMY

(A cool cucumber.)  
Joyce Parchetta is a stupid jerk.

BEVERLY

She saw what she saw.

JIMMY

I bowl with Rachel.

CLARA

How many times? Bowling how many times?

JIMMY

I dunno, I don't count. A lot. She's a good bowler.

CLARA

Matka Moya! Are you on this world? Don't you know where bowling can lead?

RUTH

Could we leave Jimmy alone possibly?

BEVERLY

You approve of this?

RUTH

Inter-religious bowling, you're right, what was I thinking?

BEVERLY

Jimmy, she's probably a nice girl.

CLARA

Probably a wonderful girl!

BEVERLY

But you gotta stop it.

CLARA

You gotta!

JIMMY

I don't gotta. Ruthie, I'd really like to hear what your meeting's about.

RUTH

Thank you, Jimmy, so would I. And I'd like to start by saying that I'm--

BEVERLY

What if you fell in love? And got married? Or had to get married?

CLARA

(Shocked.)

Bev!

BEVERLY

Oh, like it couldn't happen!

(Back to Jimmy.)

What if you had kids? Do you know what those kids would be?

JIMMY

Bowlers.

BEVERLY

Jewish!

JIMMY

Jewish bowlers.

BEVERLY

Make jokes, funny man, but that's the way it works. I didn't even know it, Gerard told me.

JIMMY

We're being very rude to Ruth.

RUTH

You certainly are. All I'm asking--

BEVERLY

If the mother's Jewish the kids are Jewish. Doesn't matter what the father is. Your kids will be Jewish. So how's God gonna feel about that? Marrying and havin' kids outside the religion?

JIMMY

Jesus was Jewish.

CLARA

[Gasp!] Stop it! I won't have that talk.

BEVERLY

Ma, he was.

CLARA

Was not! He was the first Catholic!

BEVERLY  
 Yeah, but after he was crucified.  
 (Clara's jaw drops.)  
 C'mon, you knew that.

CLARA  
 How could that be?

BEVERLY  
 'Cause he was.

CLARA  
 How?

BEVERLY  
 He just was, that's all.

CLARA  
 Impossible!

BEVERLY  
 I'm not gonna explain, look it up.

CLARA  
 They told us in school--

BEVERLY  
 It was Jerusalem, Ma! Who do you think was running around  
 over there, the Shanahan's? It's complicated, just trust me.

CLARA  
 I'm shocked...!

RUTH  
 We came here for my meeting!

BEVERLY  
 Later. We gotta clear this up.

RUTH  
 You've got years to clear it up. My thing has to be said  
 now.

BEVERLY  
 What he's doing affects me and you and Ma and --

CLARA  
 (Slams table.)  
 SILENCE!  
 (Everyone stops and stares at Clara.)  
 (MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

She proceeds calmly.)  
It's gonna be cleared up. Right now.

(A pause.)

Jimmy, this ends today. There are thousands of girls of your own religion to bowl with. Find one. You been playin' with fire and so far you been lucky. But I am turnin' on the fire hose as of right now.

JIMMY

Ma--

CLARA

And I don't wanna hear no more about it.

(Silence.)

Ruth, you can have your meeting now.

RUTH

[Ahem] Okay...

JIMMY

(Stands.)

I got just one thing to say.

(They wait.)

And I'm keepin' it to myself.

(Sits.)

BEVERLY

(Gets up.)

I need a beer.

CLARA

It's morning.

BEVERLY

It's noon.

JIMMY

You said it was too early for --

BEVERLY

For pepperoni, not beer.

(Opens fridge.)

RUTH

Okay.

(She takes a deep breath and limbers up her body, shaking up her whole self, including her lips.)

Bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb--

BEVERLY

Are you having a fit?

RUTH

It's how we warm up in theatre.

BEVERLY

(Aside to Jimmy.)  
In theatre. She's done one show.

RUTH

I've done lots of shows.

CLARA

Alright.

RUTH

You just don't come to them.

BEVERLY

When they give you some words I'll come to them.

RUTH

I've had lots of words and you know it. And they're called  
"lines," by the way.

BEVERLY

"Lines!"

CLARA

Enough!

RUTH

In "My Fair Lady" I asked Freddie Einsford Hill if it looked  
like rine when he--

CLARA

Enough! Ruthie, start already! This cheese is givin' me a  
headache!

RUTH

Well, the first thing is... I met this guy.

BEVERLY

Guy? You met a guy?

(Ruth glares. Jimmy nudges her to shut up.  
Bev tones down her response.)

I mean... really?

(She mouths, "Sorry!" to Ruth.)

RUTH

His name is Derek and he's a theatre director from New York.  
I met him a couple of --

CLARA

From New York?

RUTH

I met him a couple of weeks ago at a party. He...

CLARA

What's he doing here?

RUTH

He's directing a play at the Allen Street Theatre. That one  
that me and Lucy went to see. That one-man show. And while  
we were --

BEVERLY

That what?

RUTH

One-man show.

BEVERLY

What's that?

JIMMY

What's that? It's a show with one man.

BEVERLY

I can count. I mean how does it work?

JIMMY

How's it work?

BEVERLY

I mean if it's just the one man. Who does he say his part  
to? I mean, how can you have --

(Gestures.)

-- y'know -- if no one's there answering?

RUTH

(Summoning all her patience.)

It doesn't really matter how it works. It's a show with --

JIMMY

(To Bev.)

Look, remember Don Rickles came and did a show downtown?

(MORE)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Standin' there tellin' jokes? On a stage? That's a one-man show. Oh, sorry, he's Jewish! Did I say somethin' wrong?!

(Beverly glares at him.)

RUTH

So... this one-man show the other night was about Aaron Burr. And after--

BEVERLY

Who?

(Clara sighs wearily and drops her hand lifelessly on the table.)

RUTH

Aaron Burr.

BEVERLY

Who the hell's Aaron Burr?

RUTH

Do you really have to know?

BEVERLY

You brought him up!

RUTH

He was vice-president for Thomas Jefferson. He killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel and tried to steal parts of Louisiana and make himself king.

BEVERLY

Oh, that Aaron Burr.

RUTH

It wasn't a very good show, really.

BEVERLY

No-o-o!

(Jimmy reaches over and slowly pinches Bev's arm.)

Ow-w-w-w--! ...Wha'd you do that for?

JIMMY

So you'd shut up and let her tell this.

BEVERLY

(To Clara.)  
Did you see that?

CLARA

SHHH!

(Bev takes a swat at Jimmy and runs.)  
 Hey, I'll separate you two!

(Ruth's cellphone rings.)

RUTH

(Answers phone.)  
 Lucy, could I call you back in a--  
 (She listens. Then to the others.)  
 I'll just be a sec.  
 (She runs into the other room.)

CLARA

(Yells after her.)  
Oh, yeah, this is one great meeting!  
 (To the others.)  
 What can't she say in front of us? Y'know, I'm gettin' tired  
 of all the secrets around here.  
 (To Bev.)  
 What's goin' on in there?

BEVERLY

How should I know? I dunno.

CLARA

(To Jimmy.)  
You know somethin', look at the guilty puss on you.

JIMMY

I got no puss.

(Ruth quickly returns, stuffing the phone in  
 her pocket.)

RUTH

Okay, so it doesn't matter what the Aaron Burr show was about  
 or if it was any good. The point is, I was sitting there  
 watching it and suddenly I thought -- oh my God, my book! My  
 book!

BEVERLY

What book?

CLARA

Her book.

JIMMY

Her book.

BEVERLY

What book?

CLARA

The book she's been writin' for six months!

JIMMY

Where you been?

BEVERLY

You've been writing a book?

JIMMY

You are so up to date.

BEVERLY

A book about what?

CLARA

No, don't ask, it's a secret, a big secret, oooh--!

RUTH

Not anymore it's not. It's a book about Grampa and his statue.

(A pause.)

CLARA

My father? You been writin' a book about --

RUTH

Only now I realized -- it's not a book. It's a show! A one-man show! One-woman show! As I sat there in the theatre that night, it all unfolded. The whole story, all there! And I saw myself playing all the parts, just like the Aaron Burr guy. I was Grampa, Grandma, the sculptor, the Blessed Mother...

JIMMY

You mean... you'd tell how Grampa came to build the shrine?

RUTH

Exactly! So after the show I got to meet the director, this guy Derek. And I told him that I had this idea for a one-woman show and that I was dying to tell somebody about it. So he let me. I acted the whole thing out for him. Played all the parts.

BEVERLY  
 You acted it out? How? I mean, did you have the words, the,  
 uh-- the--?

RUTH  
 Script?

BEVERLY  
 The script?

RUTH  
 No, I just -- did it! I don't know how, I was just --  
 (Searches for word.)

CLARA  
 Inspired! It was the Holy Ghost!

RUTH  
 I guess so.

JIMMY  
 Did he like it?

RUTH  
 Like it? ...No, Jim, he didn't like it. He loved it! I  
 mean, adored it! He said it was great and that Buffalo  
 audiences would eat it up and it would be a big hit. And he  
 knows people, producers. We could do it at the Allen Street  
 Theatre right here. And he said that I could maybe... even  
 be in it.

(The three look at each other, dumbfounded.)

JIMMY  
 For real?

BEVERLY  
 You mean--? Wait a minute, you mean--? Hold on, he thinks--

RUTH  
 That's how I was, too! I was trembling when he told me. I  
 still am!

BEVERLY  
 The story of Grampa and the Blessed Mother--?

RUTH  
 Uh-huh!

JIMMY  
He says this could really be a show? That people go to? And pay money?

CLARA  
About our statue?

BEVERLY  
Our miracle?

RUTH  
Isn't it wonderful?

CLARA  
This is a New York guy?

RUTH  
A New York professional. He knows how show business works.

CLARA  
(Mulls it over, turns to Beverly and Jimmy, tapping finger on table.)  
This is it. This is what I wanted. Papa's miracle. For the world to see.

JIMMY  
No, just Buffalo she said.

BEVERLY  
Oh, come on. Once people fall in love with the story? It could play all over the country. The world!

CLARA  
Imagine it! Everyone knowing. Everyone.

BEVERLY  
I can see it. I really can.

JIMMY  
(To Ruth.)  
You're gonna have to get an agent. Or somethin' like that. Do this thing right.

RUTH  
Well, first things first.

BEVERLY  
Finally, the world would know. And those jerks who called me a nut job --  
(Gives the "up yours" gesture.)

CLARA

If this was to really happen...

(Takes a tissue from her apron pocket and  
wipes a tear.)

Did you know even Mama didn't believe him? His own wife? I never told you that. But you could see. Any time the shrine was mentioned Mama would freeze right up. But now... the whole world...

(Sobs.)

BEVERLY

(Gets up and hugs Clara.)

Mama...!

(There is a quiet moment as Bev and Clara embrace. Jimmy watches with a tear dimmed eye.)

(Presently the silence is broken by Ruth, and from this point she proceeds with extreme caution.)

RUTH

Right. Now, um... here's the thing. Before I can proceed with this... project... I need to get your blessing to tell the story.

CLARA

Blessing?

RUTH

Yeah. I mean, after all, it's about our family. It's very personal to all of us. So I wouldn't feel right, starting this show and making all kinds of plans without checking that it's okay with you guys.

BEVERLY

"Okay?"

CLARA

"Okay." Listen to her.

JIMMY

Didn't you just hear us? Whatta you think?

RUTH

Right. But, uh... before we all agree, I should tell you that the story I told Derek... is the true story.

BEVERLY

(Puzzled.)  
Yeah, we know.

RUTH

No, I mean I told him the true story. And that's the story that he liked so much. That's the story that he wants to put on stage.

(The three are all puzzled.)

BEVERLY

We know. You told him the true story. I mean, what other story is there?

RUTH

Well, that's the thing, there's... the story that we were told... and then there's...the true story.

BEVERLY

What are you talking about?

CLARA

What are you talkin' about, honey?

RUTH

I'm saying, Ma, that there's another story. About the statue. About... the way it really happened.

CLARA

The way it really happened? There's no other story.

RUTH

Well, actually --

CLARA

There's only the one story. The true one.

RUTH

Except...

CLARA

The Blessed Mother appeared to Grampa.

RUTH

I know. Except...

CLARA

Except what?

RUTH

Except... she didn't.

CLARA

She didn't? Didn't appear? What're you talkin' about?

BEVERLY

Are you nuts?

CLARA

What do you mean she didn't appear?

RUTH

I mean... that that's not a statue of the Blessed Mother.

CLARA

(A long stare.)

That's not a... That's ... That statue...

RUTH

Is not the Blessed Mother.

JIMMY

Woah--!

CLARA

(Another stare.)

Well, then would you mind telling me exactly who it is?

RUTH

Grandpa's girlfriend.

(A horrible silence.)

CLARA

(Slowly.)

Girlfriend. Grandpa's girlfriend. I see. And who on God's wonderful earth come to tell you a story like that?!

RUTH

Grandma.

(A chilling moment. Clara turns and looks at the other two, who are staring at Ruth, stupefied!)

CLARA

(Calmly.)

Okay, Ruthie. Here's what we're gonna do. I'm gonna go into the bathroom.

(MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

I'm gonna throw a little cold water in my face. Gonna take a couple o' Tylenols. And when I come out we're gonna start over. And when we get to this part you're gonna start makin' sense or I'm gonna hit you in the head with the babka pan!

RUTH

Ma, I'm telling you how it is. That statue out there is not of the Blessed Mother. It's of a girl. Named Isabelle.

CLARA

Where's that pan...?

RUTH

Ma, stop! It's of a girl named Isabelle who Grandpa was in love with.

(To Bev.)

Are you laughing at me?

BEVERLY

Well, how stupid do you think we are?

CLARA

Ruthie, honey.

BEVERLY

Honest to God, you get me all the way over here with your cheese and pepperoni. They're already bowling without me. You're upsetting Ma...

RUTH

I'm telling you the truth.

CLARA

Oh, but it's the silliest thing.

RUTH

Ma--!

CLARA

Ruthie, sweetie, use your noggin. Why would your Grandma tell you such a thing?

RUTH

Because she wanted the truth to be known.

JIMMY

Maybe you dreamed it or somethin'?

RUTH

Dreamed it? No!

BEVERLY

She made it up.

RUTH

I did not!

BEVERLY

With your theatrical imagination, yes, you did.

RUTH

Why would I make such a thing up?

BEVERLY

Who knows? I'm outa here, that's all I know.

(Goes for her bowling bag.)

Place is a loony bin.

JIMMY

Bev, stay.

BEVERLY

(Heading out.)

I'll take a rain check.

RUTH

Beverly Nowak, I don't ask much from you. You can give up one hour of bowling. This is important to me. I was there for your saxophone solo.

(Bev stops at the door. A tense moment.)

JIMMY

She was.

BEVERLY

What was I, twelve?

RUTH

So? I was there. And I had whooping cough, too. But you were nervous and scared so I wanted to be there.

CLARA

(To Bev.)

Siddown, hon'. Come on.

JIMMY

I wanna hear it.

CLARA

Me, too. C'mon.

BEVERLY

(Reluctantly moves to chair.)  
Whooped all through my solo...

JIMMY

Bev, sit.

BEVERLY

Fine. But she's making it up.

RUTH

Why would I do that?

BEVERLY

So you can do your show and become a big star.

RUTH

But make something like this up? And ask your blessing? Why wouldn't I just go on stage and tell it?

BEVERLY

How should I know? I don't know how show business works. I have a normal job.

JIMMY

Bottling ketchup is normal?

BEVERLY

Salad dressing. SALAD DU-RESSING!

CLARA

(Banging the table.)  
I wanna hear about the girlfriend! Ruthie, tell it.

RUTH

Alright.

BEVERLY

(Under her breath.)  
...craziest story I ever heard.

RUTH

I didn't say it wasn't crazy. But it's what she told me.

BEVERLY

So, why did she tell you? Always you. Grandma's favorite.

RUTH

I was not.

Willya let her tell it? JIMMY

Please! CLARA

Thank you. RUTH  
(Turns to Clara.)  
Ma.

What? CLARA

Remember when I started at the hospital I worked in the cafeteria? RUTH

Sure. Used to bring rolls home. CLARA

Right. RUTH

I miss them rolls. CLARA

Okay, remember when Grandma had her stroke, I used to visit her on my breaks? Well, on the night before she died, she took my hand and said that she wanted someone to know the truth. RUTH

Took your hand? Never took my hand. CLARA

And what she told me was this, that back in 1942, in Poland, in Grodno, Grandma and Grampa's marriage... was an "arranged" marriage. RUTH

Arranged? BEVERLY

They didn't know each other, they were just thrown at each other by the families. RUTH

I didn't know that! CLARA

RUTH

You think you're surprised. Well, so was Grandpa. Because at the time he was in love with someone else. This girl named Isabelle. And I mean really in love. So in love, Ma, that when he and Grandma moved to America, he came up with an idea.

JIMMY

An idea? What idea?

RUTH

For how he could still be with Isabelle every day.

BEVERLY

I need another beer.  
(Goes to fridge.)

JIMMY

Get me one.

CLARA

It's my mother telling you this?

RUTH

Mm-hmm. Now, on the boat coming over here Grampa made friends with a sculptor. And when he found out they were both going to the same city, Grampa placed an order with the man. For a statue.

CLARA

Of the Blessed Mother.

RUTH

No, Ma, not of the Blessed Mother. But that's what he wanted everyone to think. That's why he woke up his wife in the middle of the night and said a miracle happened in the barber shop. That Our Lady appeared.

JIMMY

But she didn't.

RUTH

No.

CLARA

It was Isabelle appeared!

RUTH

No, Ma, no.

JIMMY  
No, Ma.

CLARA  
What, so who appeared?

JIMMY  
Nobody appeared!

RUTH  
No one. He made it up. So that he could have a statue of Isabelle built.

JIMMY  
So he could look at it every day.

RUTH  
And tell everyone it was the Blessed Mother, come to spread her message of peace on earth, good will toward men.

CLARA  
Wait, that's Christmas.

RUTH  
(Wearily drops her head.)  
I'll start over...

JIMMY  
Ma, he couldn't just build a statue and tell everyone it was this other woman he was still in love with back in the old country.

CLARA  
So he tells everybody it's -- ? Nnnaaahhhh, that never happened. If my mother told you that she was off her rocker.

BEVERLY  
Totally.

RUTH  
Oh, come on you guys--!

BEVERLY  
She was feeding you a line.

RUTH  
Why? Why would she?

BEVERLY  
Why? She had a stroke, she was running on one cylinder.

JIMMY

But it coulda happened like she said.

BEVERLY

Well, sure, you believe it, you read UFO Magazine.

JIMMY

What's that got to do with it?

BEVERLY

It means you're gullible. You'll believe anything.

JIMMY

That makes me gullible?

BEVERLY

Yes.

JIMMY

You read Brides Magazine, does that make you married?

BEVERLY

You little shit--!

CLARA

Beverly! Beverly! Sit down!

BEVERLY

(Muttering.)  
Snot nose...

RUTH

If I can finish this!

CLARA

Please, finish!

BEVERLY

Go ahead, finish, it's all baloney anyway.

RUTH

Question. Has anyone here noticed that our statue out there is not your traditional Blessed Mother?

CLARA

What's that mean?

RUTH

I mean it doesn't have the traditional sort of Blessed Mother look to it.

(Clara looks puzzled.)

You know, she doesn't have the long veil. Her hair is exposed. It's long and wavy, down to her shoulders. And her dress. It's like a 1940's, like a prom-type dress. Mid-calf. Not the long flowing skirts and veils that we usually see on Mary.

CLARA

But that's the way she appeared. In the old Bible times, yeah, they wore the long robes and things. But this was the forties. ...Look, honey -- I want you to listen for a second. I want you to think back. Do this for me. Think about what your Grandma was like. Do you remember? Huh? Are you thinkin' about your Grandma?

RUTH

Yes.

CLARA

Got a clear picture in your head?

RUTH

Yes.

CLARA

Rotten, wasn't she?

BEVERLY

Ma!

CLARA

Well?

BEVERLY

Your own mother!

CLARA

Who better to say? Now I'm gonna tell you this the one time so you'll understand, and then next Saturday I'll go to confession. 'Cause I ain't had these thoughts or said these words for twenty years. ...Honey, that woman was mean. From as early as I can remember, nasty. Three, four years old I was and she would flick my ears whenever I wasn't lookin'.

BEVERLY

She'd what?

CLARA

(Casually to Beverly.)  
What's that over there?

BEVERLY

Huh?  
(Bev turns and looks away. Clara reaches over  
and flicks the back of her ear.)

Ow!

CLARA

For no reason! Drove me crazy. Finally hadda wear ear muffs, all year round. They used to call me "Muffy." What it came down to was, she didn't like me. I don't know why. But that's how it was and I lived with it. Told myself, okay, so other people got nice mothers. Lucky them. So what? I got a nice father. And a nice husband and good kids. That's plenty for me, I'm satisfied. And my kids...they'll never have to go through what I did with that--  
(Stops herself.)  
-- with that unhappy woman. So, what I'm saying is, that's exactly the kind of lousy thing your Grandma woulda done. Tell you a story like that at the last minute, to make us think bad about your grandfather. A stinker up to the very end. Gettin' in that last flick.

(A moment.)

RUTH

Well, maybe that's true, Ma. But there is something else Grandma told me about, that, if you saw it, it might change your mind about things.

(A pause.)

Ma, the statue's face. She's pretty, right?

CLARA

Sure. Very pretty.

RUTH

Yeah. Everyone said so. When the statue was delivered, and they opened the packing crate, everyone said the same thing -- "Oh, how pretty!" All except Grandma. Know what Grandma said?

(Clara waits for it.)

"Muj boze! To ona!"

[Phonetically: Moo-ee Bo-zha! Taw oh-na!]

..."My God! It's her!" ...Isabelle.

(A pause.)

The sculptor, Ma. How did he do it? How did he make the statue look like Isabelle when Isabelle wasn't there for him to look at? She was back in Poland. ...How'd he do it?

(Beverly and Jimmy look at each other,  
puzzled.)

CLARA

That is the face of the Blessed Mother.

RUTH

Is it?

(A pause.)

Ma... what there was, was a photograph. A picture of  
Isabelle. Grampa let the sculptor use it as a guide.

BEVERLY

Now, how do you know that?

RUTH

Because Grandma said.

BEVERLY

She said.

RUTH

She saw the picture.

BEVERLY

She said she saw it.

RUTH

Yes. One night Grandpa was sneaking a look at it and she  
caught him.

BEVERLY

Caught him sneakin' a peak?

RUTH

Yes.

BEVERLY

Where is it?

RUTH

He hid it.

(Beverly groans.)

They had a big fight about it and he hid it, here somewhere.

BEVERLY

Earth to Ruth, hello! Sweetie, there's no picture!

RUTH

Just because I don't have it doesn't mean --

BEVERLY

Get this kid a subscription to Big Foot Weekly! There is no picture of Isabelle. We woulda come across it. How many times have Ma and I cleaned this house? When we had the exterminators in that time, they had us tear the whole place apart.

JIMMY

(Quietly.)  
It's not in the house.

BEVERLY

I'm sorry, Sis, but you got us here for nothin'.

JIMMY

The picture's not in the house.

BEVERLY

The statue is a statue of the Blessed Mother, just like it always was.

JIMMY

The picture's not in the house.

(They all stop and turn to Jimmy.)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Grampa woulda kept the picture of Isabelle... with Isabelle. In the shrine.

(They all look at one another.)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(Runs for his tool box.)  
It's in the shrine!  
(Picks up his tool box and runs for the door.  
Exits.)

(A frozen moment. Then Bev makes a mad dash for the door, following Jimmy out.)

CLARA

Don't you go bustin' up that shrine!  
(To herself as she runs for the window.)  
I'll flatten those two!  
(Out the window.)  
Be gentle with her! She's a virgin!  
(Leans on the sink, gets her bearings.)  
My God... my God... I don't know whether I'm up or down,  
comin' or goin'.

(MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

Ruthie, I hate to say it, but I do remember Mama tearin' the place apart after Papa died, lookin' for something. I asked her if I could help, but she started to go for my ear, so I ran.

RUTH

Maybe that's what she was looking for, huh? A picture?

CLARA

No, but they're wasting their time. There's nothing in there. I should know, I clean it every week. Change the flowers, the light bulb. ...Boy, I know Mama was a little crazy, but tellin' you that nutty story right there in the hospital. ...Uh-oh. Ruthie, while she was tellin' it... that lady in the next bed... remember, with the lipstick and the big hair -- she didn't overhear it, did she?

RUTH

(Thinks.)

That lady? Oh, no, I remember, she died that morning.

CLARA

Oh, good.

RUTH

Ma--!

(Suddenly - BANG - Jimmy bursts back into the room with Bev close behind lugging the toolbox. Jimmy carries an old battered tin box.)

JIMMY

Did I tell you? Did I say? Did I call it or what?

BEVERLY

Don't grab all the credit! Who said the base was hollow? That was me!

CLARA

What is it?

JIMMY

A box, Ma!

(Jimmy sets the tin box down and they gather 'round like it's the Arc of the Covenant!)

RUTH

That was quick.

JIMMY

It was in the first place we looked!

BEVERLY

Ma, you know that big wooden base the statue sits on? Well, he opens the door, and I go --

(Emphasizing with a fist on the table.)

It's not in here!

(Now she re-enacts how she knocked on it a second time and discovered:)

It's hollow! It's hollow!

JIMMY

And there was this loose board. So...

CLARA

Well, open it, open it!

BEVERLY

(Gets coins from her pocket.)

Oh, plus sixty-five cents was in the donation cup.

CLARA

Givvita me. That goes right in the bank.

(Puts coins in tin can on top of fridge.)

JIMMY

(Examines lock.)

Wow, this lock is old. I wonder where the key is.

BEVERLY

I wouldn't be surprised if it was buried with Grampa.

CLARA

Well, I ain't diggin' him up!

JIMMY

(Goes through his toolbox.)

This won't take long.

CLARA

A mysterious tin box! Like in a story!

JIMMY

I know, it's like if the Hardy Boys were Catholic.

BEVERLY

Do you think there's money in it?

CLARA

Nah, Papa never had any money.

BEVERLY

'Cause maybe it's all in here. I mean, what else could he have been hiding?

RUTH

I told you what he was hiding.

BEVERLY

I'll believe that when I see it.

JIMMY

(At the box with a hammer and ice pick.)

Here we go...

(To Beverly.)

Here...

(Bev holds the box steady.)

(Jimmy places the tip of the ice pick in the lock and is about to take a whack, when--)

CLARA

Wait!

(He stops.)

...Maybe Papa wouldn't want us to know.

(A pause as they all silently consider this.

Now a complete reversal.)

Nah, open it!

(Clara stands apart from the group as Jimmy gives the lock three whacks.)

JIMMY

(Success!)

Oh, yeah!

(Silence! He puts down the tools and lifts the lid of the box.)

(They peer into the box and are astonished. There is no need to dig through papers -- it is right there! They stare for a frozen moment. Then they slowly turn to Clara. She approaches them and looks inside.)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(Finally.)

The face!

(MORE)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(Reaches into the box and slowly lifts out a photograph.)  
It's the face! On the statue!

CLARA

Oh, my!

BEVERLY

It's her!

CLARA

Isabelle!

(They gently set the picture down. Clara looks at it but can't bring herself to touch it yet. Jimmy looks back into the box.)

JIMMY

Something else...

RUTH

Letters. Yeah...

(Removes 2 or 3 envelopes, already opened.)  
Addressed to Grandpa.

JIMMY

(Takes them.)  
Maybe love letters, huh? Saved her love letters maybe.

RUTH

(Points to an envelope.)  
"Isabelle!"  
(Puts them back in box.)

JIMMY

(Gently takes photo from Clara.)  
Look how pretty!

(There is a silence as everyone considers the implications of this new discovery.)

(When we catch momentary glimpses of the picture we'll see that it is an 8x10 black and white studio head-shot of a young woman, taken in the early 1940's.)

BEVERLY

(Moving edgily around the room.)  
Okay... Okay... So that's great. That's great. Huh? Not the Blessed Mother.

(MORE)

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

(Looks out window.)  
 She's not the Blessed Mother.  
 (Throws arms up in the air in mock  
 jubilation.)  
 She's ISABELLE! Grampa's kewpie doll! His bit of kolaczki  
 on the side.

CLARA

Beverly!

BEVERLY

And what does that make us? Huh? Who are we? Anybody wanna  
 take a guess? Who are we, gang?  
 (The 3 look at each other puzzled.)  
 Come on, don't you know? We're the assholes of the  
 neighborhood!

CLARA

Language!

BEVERLY

Why, you got a better word for what we are? All our lives,  
 Ma -- all our lives, all of us -- we been telling people  
 "the Blessed Mother appeared to Grampa!" That's what we  
 said. Uh-huh. The Blessed Mother. Couldn'a been some  
 normal saint. Couldn'a been some regular low-life patron  
 saint of barbers, Saint Luigi! No! We said Jesus' Mother!  
The Queen of Heaven! Materialized right there next to the  
 Mennen Skin Bracer, yessir!

JIMMY

(Gazing at photo.)  
 Gee, she's pretty...!

BEVERLY

Will you stop that?!  
 (Sits.)  
 So, here we are.  
 (Looks at window.)  
 And there she is. Not the Blessed Mother. What are my  
 friends gonna say? What are they gonna think of me? All  
 these years tellin' 'em how blessed we are. "We were  
 chosen!"

CLARA

(Suddenly.)  
 My soup!

BEVERLY

Huh?

CLARA

My soup! "Our Lady's Miracle Soup!"

JIMMY

Yeah, what about that? What about all the miracles with the soup? All those rashes that cleared up. Those colds that went away. That fungus on Mrs. Cavanaugh's foot.

CLARA

Did they just go away on their own?

BEVERLY

Ma, that foot had a jungle growing on it! How could --

CLARA

I don't know! I don't know what I know anymore!

(To herself.)

..."Prepared on Holy Ground."

RUTH

Ma, it's still a lovely slogan. And who's to say it's--

BEVERLY

(Suddenly.)

Oh, Jesus -- Gerard! Gerard! He wanted to come see it tomorrow! My God, what am I gonna -- what am I -- ?!

JIMMY

(Still looking at photo.)

Builds a shrine to his girlfriend. That's so cool.

BEVERLY

What is wrong with you? Doesn't it bother you just a little bit that we were lied to our whole lives?

CLARA

(Quietly.)

I'm gonna miss her. My whole life, whenever things got bad -- if you kids was sick, when your father got laid off that time -- I always knew we'd come through it, 'cause o' her.

BEVERLY

(To Ruth.)

I hope you're happy! Is it what you wanted?

(Re: Clara.)

Will you remember this lovely picture every time you step on the stage in your one-woman extravaganza?

RUTH

No, I'll remember how my sister went off the deep end because she couldn't face a little truth.

BEVERLY

A little truth?

RUTH

Ma, I'm sorry.

CLARA

I can't understand it. Builds a shrine. Tells that story. That's somethin' a crazy person would do.

RUTH

I know. That's how I felt, hearing it in the hospital.

CLARA

Yeah. Musta been an upsetting night for you, too.

(Ruth nods.)

Musta been that night you didn't bring home the rolls.

RUTH

I don't know, but I do remember when it was time to leave, Grandma asked if I could please stay 'cause she had a little more to tell me.

CLARA

...More?

RUTH

Yeah, there's more, Ma. More to the story. Do you think you could hear it?

BEVERLY

Oh, Jesus...

RUTH

It's about that night before they left for America. They were in their little apartment, packing. And around midnight there was a knocking on their door. Grandpa opened it and it was Isabelle. Holding a baby.

CLARA

A baby?

RUTH

Grandma thought, "Who's this stranger with a baby? We're trying to pack!" Then what does this strange woman do, she begs them to take the baby with them to America.

(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

Grandma says, "You must be outa your mind, go away!" But Isabelle said they must do it -- because the baby was her's, Isabelle's... and Grandpa's.

(Clara is stunned.)

Grandma felt like she was in some horrible dream. But there was Grandpa, looking to her for an answer. And... Grandma took the baby. Isabelle ran home to her family, and that was the last time Grandpa ever saw her. The barber and his new wife made it to America and raised the little girl. Little Clara.

(Silence. The listeners are stunned by the story. Now Clara begins to cry. Beverly goes to Clara with a comforting gesture.)

RUTH (CONT'D)

Ma...

BEVERLY

Get out. Go home.

JIMMY

Bev!

BEVERLY

Or here.

(Takes cheese knife.)

Do it quick. Just take this and stab her!

RUTH

Beverly--!

BEVERLY

How could you do this to her? Your own mother! Or is she? Is that another surprise up your sleeve? Who's our real mother, Ruth? Mrs. Schmidt?

RUTH

Ma --

BEVERLY

Leave her alone!

CLARA

(Through her sobs.)

My mother... Some poor girl I didn't even know...

RUTH

Ma, I'm sorry. Really. But I had to tell you. And not just so I can go and do this show, no.

(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

Because I think it's better that you know. I've wanted to tell you since Grandma died.

BEVERLY

But how would you like it? I suppose you'd love finding out that your mother isn't your real mother!

RUTH

No, of course not.

BEVERLY

Well?

RUTH

'Cause I like my mother.

BEVERLY

It doesn't matter how Ma felt about her, it's the woman she grew up with! Don't you realize this changes everything for her? Nothing she believed in is true for her anymore. Or for me either. Or him.

JIMMY

Leave me out.

BEVERLY

What do you believe in, anyway?

JIMMY

In gettin' along.

RUTH

But isn't knowing the truth better? Instead of basing our lives on some kind of -- I mean, come on, Bev, a miracle? Do we look like people God gave a miracle to? Does it make sense?

BEVERLY

It's not supposed to make sense, it's religion!

RUTH

Well, I'm sorry, I need more. I need -- I don't know -- logic. I'm glad Grandma told me. Glad I found out we weren't picked special. This way I know my happiness is up to me.

CLARA

(Quietly.)

Ruth --

Ma?  
RUTH

CLARA  
You asked my permission to tell your story in a show. I don't give it.

RUTH  
Oh, Ma -- !

CLARA  
I'm sorry, no. To have you humiliate the whole family.

RUTH  
Oh, Mama, no, it wouldn't be like that.

CLARA  
The whole world laughin' at us, for bein' fools, believing in a miracle that never was.

RUTH  
Ma -- oh, Jesus -- of course, whatever you say goes, but -- not yet, please don't say no yet. This really is a beautiful story.

BEVERLY  
Beautiful? How do you get beautiful out of that?

RUTH  
Because in a--  
(Her cellphone rings.)  
Damn it!  
(Grabs phone, opens it.)  
Lucy, would you ple--! ...Oh! Derek!

BEVERLY  
Oh, jeez, this guy...!

RUTH  
Hi! Funny you should call, we just found the photograph. Yes, of Isabelle, it was in the-- I'm sorry, what? Okay, congratulations, for what, what happened?

BEVERLY  
(Aside.)  
He got the Aaron Burr award for outstanding--

CLARA  
SHHH!!

RUTH

(Into phone.)

Slow down, I can't understand you, you got a--

(She listens. Her face slowly falls.)

Oh-h-h, hey, wow, that's great. I'm so happy for you. Oh, really. Sure. No, I understand. I will, you bet. Okay, well, take care. Me, too. 'Bye.

(She closes her phone and pockets it.)

(Silence.)

CLARA

What happened?

RUTH

Derek's got a pilot.

(Off Clara's confused look.)

A TV show. Sitcom. He's going to direct it. His agent just called. He flies to L.A. in the morning. It's what he's always wanted.

(A pause.)

BEVERLY

What a piece o' work.

JIMMY

What about your show?

RUTH

He still thinks it's... a cute idea. He says I should keep working on it. And if I'm ever in California I should look him up.

(A little smile.)

...Show biz.

(There is a silence. Now she proceeds, valiantly holding back tears.)

Ma... this really is a beautiful story. Because in a long roundabout way, Grandma was letting you know that you were wanted. You don't need a miracle, Ma. You were loved.

(She exits into the bathroom and closes the door.)

(A quiet moment.)

JIMMY

Okay, so... we weren't chosen special by God. That's okay, right? He's still smiling on us.

BEVERLY

Laughing at us.

JIMMY

Nah. Maybe laughin' with us. Not at us. 'Cause maybe we're supposed to laugh, too, huh? Maybe that's it, maybe if we all had a great big --

BEVERLY

Oh, can it!

(To herself.)

Statue. Why did he have to build a--? Well, I guess, you're from Europe, you think statue, I dunno. That's what they got over there, statues.

(Now Ruth suddenly reappears, a bit more in control. She walks to the center of the room.)

RUTH

I have to tell you the rest of it!

CLARA

(Sits.)

Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

BEVERLY

Shoot me!

RUTH

On that night in Poland...

BEVERLY

That friggin' night in Poland, we're back!

RUTH

It was a terrible night, Ma. The war had reached them. Grandma said it was like a nightmare. There were explosions and gunfire and people screaming in the streets. And when Isabelle handed little baby Clara to Grandma, a bomb went off right next door. Isabelle covered her ears and screamed, "Dlaczego, w nasza swieta noc? Yom Kippur!"

[Phonetically:

Dla-chay-go vnah-sho shviento nawitz? Yom Kippur!]

(They look at her, puzzled.)

"Why on our holiest of nights? Yom Kippur!"

(They continue to stare at Ruth un-comprehendingly.)

Yom Kippur. Ma, Isabelle was Jewish. Your mother. She was a Jewish girl.

(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

(The three look at each other, trying to make sense of it. It's a lo-o-ong moment.)

CLARA

My-- my mother...

BEVERLY

(A pause.)

And if... the mother's Jewish...

CLARA

(A pause.)

That means...

JIMMY

(A pause.)

Mazel Tov!

(The three sit and try to comprehend it. Beverly stares at her mother, her face full of questions.)

BEVERLY

Jewish? We're -- I'm -- I'm Jewish? How does that work? I mean -- I'm a different... religion? Race? I don't -- I don't get it, I don't know how to feel. How am I supposed to feel? Ma, how do you feel?

CLARA

I been Jewish for ten seconds, how the hell do I know how I feel?!

BEVERLY

W-what should we do? Call Father Tim?

CLARA

And tell him what?

BEVERLY

Tell him -- we had a -- your mother was -- I don't know!

(At a loss, turns to Ruth.)

You! You got us into this! Now whatta we do?

RUTH

Bev--

BEVERLY

Okay, okay, I'm trying to... get it in my head. So... we've always been... But... Damn, I wish I knew some Jewish people I could talk to about this. Man!

(MORE)

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

I don't know any Jewish people. Is that normal? Should I be ashamed? Should I maybe've gotten out more and mingled? Wow! I don't know a single Jew!

JIMMY

You know some now!

(Extends hand.)

Put 'er there, Shirley!

(Boggled, she doesn't take his hand.)

Y'know, Ma... maybe this comes at a good time. I mean, since this Catholic business ain't been workin' out too good for us anyway...

BEVERLY

Comes at a good-- What?

JIMMY

(Shrugs.)

Maybe we should give it a try. Learn about it. They give classes.

CLARA

(Stands.)

Are you crazy? Are you on this world?

JIMMY

What's wrong?

CLARA

Listen to him! What if we do what you say? What if we take classes and we convert to Jewish?

JIMMY

Okay.

CLARA

Okay. Then what if we find out it's even worse than what we got? More rules! More stuff to memorize! More -- look at me, I'm talkin' with my hands!

BEVERLY

(Suddenly remembers.)

GERARD! Gerard! He can't marry outside the faith! Mama! What am I gonna do?

CLARA

Matka Moya!

JIMMY

(To Clara.)  
It's pronounced, "Oy vey!"

BEVERLY

(Nearly apoplectic, she points accusingly at Ruth.)  
I don't know who I am!  
(Grabs bowling ball bag, staggers to door.)  
Holy crap! How am I even supposed to bowl tonight if I don't know who I am?!  
(SLAM! She's gone.)

JIMMY

Well, I know who I am. And I know what I'm doin' tonight.  
(Takes ring box from pocket, hands it to Clara.)  
Ma, check this out.  
(Takes cellphone from pocket and dials. Into phone.)  
Rachel Silverstein, please. Thank you.  
(To Clara.)  
Whattaya think, Ma?

CLARA

(She is stunned.)  
I--I-- !

JIMMY

(Into phone.)  
Rache? Jimmy. Can you sneak out? The diner in twenty minutes? Good. Have I got news for you!  
(Jimmy pockets cellphone, runs to Clara, takes rings box.)  
Wish me luck, Ma!

(Kisses Clara's forehead and runs out the door.)

(When the dust settles and the two women are alone...)

RUTH

So, Ma...

CLARA

No. No more words. Not just now, Ruthie... Not now...

(A moment. Ruth rather sheepishly begins to leave.)

She hesitates, maybe to say something, but decides better and exits. Clara is alone. She looks at the photo of Isabelle on the table. Hesitantly she approaches it. Slowly she picks it up and looks at it. THE LIGHTS FADE TO DIM.)

## EPILOGUE

(A few days later. The big soup kettle is still on the stove and the table is littered with cooking clutter and cook books. The 8x10 photo of Isabelle now holds a prominent position on the fridge, held up with a magnet. Clara is at the fridge removing some wrapped sandwiches. She takes them to the kitchen table and puts them in a bag.)

(Now Ruth enters through the outside door.)

RUTH

Trunk's all loaded. Oh, Ma, come on, that's enough.

CLARA

Just some more sandwiches.

RUTH

The George Washington Bridge will collapse.

CLARA

You'll be thanking me when you get hungry. Sit for a minute.

RUTH

Lucy's waiting.

CLARA

She can wait. We move slower in this town, remember?

(Pulls out a chair. Ruth sits.)

Now... you'll call me? You'll write?

RUTH

Every week.

CLARA

(Takes an envelope from the top of the fridge.)

Here. A little somethin' to start you off.

RUTH

Aw, Ma, you don't have to do that.

CLARA

Go on, take it. Whattaya gonna do, live on potato chips and Snapple down there? Get yourself a steak, some green vegetables.

RUTH  
Thank you, that's very nice.  
(Puts envelope on table.)

CLARA  
So... y'excited?

RUTH  
Uh-huh.

CLARA  
Scared?

RUTH  
Uh-huh.

CLARA  
Y'know, I never did nothin' daring like you're doin'. Takin' chances, that wasn't for me. Too chicken. Always played it safe.

RUTH  
You did what you had to do.

CLARA  
'Cept for stealin' that record that time.  
(Suddenly.)  
Woops.

RUTH  
'Scuse me? Excuse me?

CLARA  
I never meant to tell ya'.

RUTH  
Stole a record? You stole a record?  
(Clara nods.)  
Y'mean a big, like--

CLARA  
No, no, a little forty-five. From Sattler's Music Department. I was fourteen and scared to death. But my mother wouldn't let me buy that kinda music, so...

RUTH  
Which song?

CLARA  
"Heartbreak Hotel." I woulda stole a car for Elvis Presley.

RUTH  
 My mother! A felon for Elvis!  
 (Laughs.)

CLARA  
 Do you think less of me?

RUTH  
 Oh, Ma...

CLARA  
 Good. I feel better then. We shouldn't have secrets between us. Especially now. Who knows when I'll see you again?

RUTH  
 I won't be gone forever.

CLARA  
 I know.

RUTH  
 I just have to give this a try, y'know...

CLARA  
 I know.

RUTH  
 ...to see what I'm made of.

(A quiet moment.)

RUTH (CONT'D)  
 So... what are you going to do with the statue now, Ma?

CLARA  
 Isabelle?

RUTH  
 Now that the miracle's over.

CLARA  
 Well, we had a meeting about that last night while you were packin'. Me, Jimmy and Bev. Bev says, first of all, I should come up with a new speech. Think so?  
 (Ruth shrugs "maybe." Clara mulls it over.  
 She slowly begins an impromptu speech.)  
 This statue... was built by my father in 1943. And it... it stands here to honor one of the unsung heroes of World War Two.

(She looks to Ruth for approval.  
 (MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

Ruth nods encouragement.)  
 A brave little lady who ran through the streets of Poland.  
 In the middle of the night with enemy bombs exploding all  
 around her, carrying her little baby girl in her arms.  
 Riskin' her own life so that her little daughter would be  
 spared. This statue reminds us of all the brave women who  
 sent their children to a safer place... and those kind women  
 who took them in.

RUTH

...Like Grandma?

CLARA

Like Grandma.

(Now a CAR HONKS OUTSIDE. Ruth pulls out her  
 cellphone and starts texting.)

CLARA (CONT'D)

The girl can't wait to get back.

RUTH

I'll tell her to hold her horses.  
 (Finishes text, shuts phone.)  
 Ma, you don't really dislike Lucy, do you? Just 'cause she  
 moved away?

CLARA

Nah, I was just needlin' ya'. She's a good kid. ...She's no  
 Gorgeous George but you can't have everything.

RUTH

(Stares at Clara -- wondering!)  
 ...Ma?

CLARA

It's okay, Ruthie. I just want you to know. It's okay.

RUTH

Are you...? What are you...? You understand?

CLARA

Hey, I know the score, I got cable.

RUTH

Oh, Christ...  
 (Overcome, the tears start. She quickly digs  
 for a tissue in her pocket.)  
 Have you always known? Why didn't you ever say anything?

CLARA

Why didn't you?

RUTH

I thought you'd be upset.

CLARA

I was. ...At first. Then I figured God made you the way you are. Who am I to complain?

RUTH

And...the Church? What about them?

CLARA

People gotta be happy. They're gonna have to get used to that.

RUTH

You're not just that barber's daughter, Ma. You're...

CLARA

(Busies herself.)

Time to go. C'mon. Gotta take that Big Apple by storm.

RUTH

Right.

CLARA

Only don't do no dirty shows!

RUTH

No, ma'm. "The Sound of Music," that's it.

CLARA

You play a nun, don't bother comin' home.

RUTH

(Gathering final things.)

So, Ma, this meeting last night. What else did --

CLARA

Oh, yeah, well, we were thinkin' we might buy Kozlowski's bakery. I could make my Kisiel, my Kolaczki, all that. Keep the free soup goin'. Put the statue in the window. Call the place "Isabelle's."

RUTH

Buy it?

CLARA

Yeah.

RUTH

Ma, what're you talking about? You can't afford a new toaster, you're gonna buy a building? Buy it with what?

CLARA

The savings account.

RUTH

The savings account? Whattaya mean? Those coins?  
 (Clara just smiles.)  
 But how much could that be? Those were little dimes and quarters and...

CLARA

Every day, for sixty-five years, with interest, it adds up.

RUTH

(Her wheels turn.)  
 Sixty-five...

(Doing the math, she is dumbstruck. Clara just grins.

(Now suddenly it occurs to Ruth -- the envelope! She grabs it from the table and opens it. She is stunned by what she sees. She pulls out a check as her jaw drops!)

RUTH (CONT'D)

Mama!!

CLARA

So, the miracle's over, huh?

RUTH

(Re: the check.)  
 Oh, Mama -- ! This is --

CLARA

It's a little leftover change.

RUTH

But-- but --

CLARA

See, it was always a puzzle. What to do with the money. People gave 'cause it made 'em feel good. So... your turn, Ruthie. Give. Tell Mama's story. Make 'em feel good.

RUTH

I will.

CLARA

I got Jimmy some snow tires, too.

(As Ruth throws last minute things in her bag.)

There y'go. Now, I don't care what kinda show you get, you make 'em give you some time off. They can't work you to death.

RUTH

Yes, ma'm.

CLARA

Tell 'em you gotta visit the old lady, y'hear? I want you home for Chris-- the holidays.

RUTH

Right.

CLARA

You and Lucy both.

RUTH

(This stuns her.)

We put up the wrong statue, Ma. It should've been you.

CLARA

Alright, off with ya. And here, take this, too.  
(Hands her a jar inside a paper bag.)

RUTH

What is it?  
(Pulls out jar.)

CLARA

Gefilte fish.

RUTH

Oh, this is gefilte fish.

CLARA

Jimmy said to give it to ya'.

RUTH  
Looks weird. Did you try any?

CLARA  
It'll never beat a pierogi. ...Go on, get goin'.

RUTH  
I love you, Ma.

CLARA  
I know. Me, too.

(An awkward moment. An awkward hug. Then a parting smile between them and Ruth exits.)

(Alone now, Clara goes to the table and consults her cookbook. Reads to herself.)

Oh, they're dumplings!  
(She lifts her cookbook.)  
Matzoh balls are just dumplings!  
(Now we see the title: "Jewish Cooking.")

(She puts down the book, dips her fingers into a bowl and begins rolling a dumpling in her hands as)

THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

END OF PLAY

## POLISH PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Nowak..... No-wack  
Kisiel..... Kee-shul  
Dupa..... Doo-puh  
Kolaczki.. Kuh-lahtch-kee  
Wascolevitch... Wahsca-leh-vitch  
Madzykowski... Magic-owski

IF AN INTERMISSION IS DESIRED...

Please use this alternate dialogue starting on Page 49:

CLARA (CONT'D)

(Slowly.)

Girlfriend. Grandpa's girlfriend. I see. And who on God's wonderful earth come to to tell you a story like that?

RUTH

Grandma.

(The three stare at Ruth, stupefied.)

(The Lights Fade to Black.)

END OF ACT ONE

-----INTERMISSION-----

ACT II

SCENE 1

(Moments later. All are as we last saw them.)

JIMMY

Grandma?!

CLARA

My mother?! She told you what?

RUTH

That the statue out there is not of the Blessed Mother. It's of a girl. Named Isabelle.

(Bev laughs.)

Named Isabelle, who Grandpa was in love with. What are you laughing at?

BEVERLY

Well, how stupid do you think we are?

(CONTINUE AS WRITTEN)