

whore? You're a whore, and your husband knows it. That's why it's over.

LESLIE: *(Pause.)* At least I'm not dead.

STUART: *(Looking around, reacting to the sound of a gun cocking.)* What's that?

LESLIE: Sounded like a gun being cocked.

STUART: Now, come on, I was just kidding. I was just stressed over this whole thing. I can make up for this. I can. I have a lot of money. *(Yelling.)* I have money! I'm gonna help you out! No problem!

LESLIE: I don't want money. I wanted you to admit what you did to me.

STUART: Okay, okay. I did it. I did it. You're right. I did it. Okay? Oh—  
*(Gun shot. Stuart's shoulder thrusts backwards.)*

STUART: *(Grabbing his chest.)* Uh. Jesus. *(Looking at himself.)* What'd you do?  
*(Gun shot. His body thrusts forward. He grabs his stomach.)*

STUART: What'd you do to me?! *(He collapses.)*

LESLIE: Nothing. *(Raises her empty hands.)* Just like you did to me. Right? Just a drug deal gone bad.

## WITHOUT YOU

*Marilyn, 70s, and Jim, 80s, were very happily married for fifty-two years. They have been blessed with six lovely children and nine wonderful grandchildren. This past year Jim died unexpectedly while in Marilyn's care. It is nearing the end of the Christmas season and Marilyn is having a difficult time. She's talking on the phone with one of her daughters who is checking in with her. Marilyn always insists that her children call when they get back home to let her know they are safe and sound.*

MARILYN: *(On phone.)* I'm not being a worrywart!

JIM: Of course she is. But she can't help it. She's talking to one of our daughters.

MARILYN: The snow is falling in big clumps here. The reports say there are lots of accidents!

JIM: *(Beat.)* Isn't she beautiful?

MARILYN: I'm tired. I'm going to bed . . . I'm fine. I just feel the week went way too fast. I can't believe it's already the twenty-seventh. Can you? . . . It went too quick for me. Ahh, it always does.

JIM: Yes. And then the kids and grandkids all go home and there you are again . . .

MARILYN: I might take the pill to help me sleep. Sometimes when I'm so tired it's even harder to . . . What? Yes, of course. I'm fine! . . . I'm not depressed!

JIM: That's what she told me the first Christmas after her grandmother died.

MARILYN: It was nice—too short. And of course, I'm a little bluesy to see Sarah go back, but I know, I know. She has an early train to catch. She's got to get back to work . . . Yes, yes! I'm fine, honey. *(Sighs.)* I just miss him at times like this, when I'm alone here.

JIM: I miss you, too.

MARILYN: Now, you and Sarah go to sleep so you can get up early. Tell Sarah to call me the moment she gets into Chicago, all right? *(Beat.)* Before you go, didn't you turn off the Christmas tree lights before you left tonight? . . . You did. I thought so. Well, that's strange . . . Because I just came out of my bath and they seem to be on again . . . I'm telling you they are! I'm looking at them! . . . All right. *(Calling to Sarah as well.)* Kiss good night! To both my babies! *(She looks around. Pause.)*

JIM: Our babies are in their thirties and forties now. *(Marilyn sighs.)* It's not so bad.

MARILYN: *(Looks around as if she sort of heard something.)* Is someone there?

JIM: It's me. I assume you haven't forgotten. I hope these fifty-one years weren't that forgettable.

MARILYN: Fifty-two.

JIM: Oops. Forgot that one. Fifty-two? *(Beat.)* Yeah, that sounds about right.

MARILYN: Now, why did I say that out loud? Fifty-two. *(Beat.)* Strange.

JIM: It's not that strange. It was very relevant to our conversation.

MARILYN: *(Ignoring him.)* I wonder how those lights got on. *(Calling out. Not seriously thinking anything.)* Is that you again, Jim? Ringing the phone, turning on lights all week?

JIM: Of course. But you never seem to see or hear me. It's futile.

MARILYN: What are you trying to tell me, hon, huh? *(Pause. Sighs.)* Oh. I am old. Only old people and crazy people talk to themselves. But most especially old, crazy people. *(Pained by her last thought.)* Ohh.

JIM: You're not old!

MARILYN: *(Gasps.)* HUUUHH!

JIM: Huh, I think she might have heard me.

MARILYN: *(Panicked. Near speechless.)* Who, who, who—

JIM: She most definitely heard me. *(To Marilyn.)* Now, I don't want you to worry. It's just me—Jim.

MARILYN: *(Still very panicked.)* Well, I, I will worry, whomever you are, because my husband Jim is, is . . . he's, well . . . he's dead.

JIM: Technically speaking—yes.

MARILYN: Technically . . . *(Whining.)* Oh my God! Something is wrong with my head. I'm hearing people now. This is terrible. I have old-timers.

JIM: Oh Marilyn, no. Your head is as sharp as it ever was—as sharp as that young mathematics teacher I married *fifty-two* years back.

MARILYN: Who are you? Why have you come here? You can take whatever you want.

JIM: I don't want anything. I mean, except maybe a Heggie's Chocolate. But I don't think I can taste them anymore. But they sure look good. *(Beat.)* I just wanted to chat with you. I miss you, and I wanted to tell you something. Important.

MARILYN: *(Pointing in his direction.)* I have to warn you, sir, that my children may come over here at any time. My neighbors watch for me constantly. They *all* know me. I'm very, very friendly, so they'll call my son John and his wife and my other children when they see you in here. And then the police will be over here like that.

JIM: Well, they wouldn't be able to reach John, would they?

MARILYN: Sure they would.

JIM: No. John, Cindy, and Marie left for the other grandparents' house in Minnesota. They always spend half the holiday there. In fact, all our kids and grandkids are sleeping or heading to bed in their homes, Marilyn. You know that.

MARILYN: I may know that, I may, but I don't know what I know anymore because this isn't right.

JIM: I suppose our neighbors could call them and wake them if they saw me, but I don't think they can see me. I'm not even sure you can. Can you?

MARILYN: I wonder if I took my sleeping pill. Maybe I'm sound asleep. This is a dream.

JIM: No, no, you're not asleep. You snore when you're asleep. You're not snoring.

MARILYN: Snore?! Like fun I do! You're the one who snores. Fifty-two years of listening to that foghorn nose of yours.

JIM: Well, listen to you. So you do believe me now?

MARILYN: Not in the slightest. I think I left the TV on and you're some sort of character in some movie I left running. I worked you into my dream.

JIM: What movie?

MARILYN: Well, I don't know.

JIM: I just wondered what handsome actor I might sound like.

MARILYN: You don't sound like any *handsome* actor. I just meant that I fell asleep watching *It's a Wonderful Life* or *A Christmas Carol* and the ghosts got all confused in my head.

JIM: Oh, I love those movies. I'll tell you what though, Lionel Barrymore was the best Scrooge ever. He really knew how to make that—

MARILYN: I know. I know. We listened to that tape every single Christmas. I mean, my husband and I did.

JIM: Did you mind that? (*Marilyn shrugs.*) So do you think I'm a good ghost or a bad ghost?

MARILYN: I think you're a big fool. My son John gave me too much brandy in my cider this afternoon—is all. You're just my sour stomach talking.

JIM: So why do you keep talking back to me?

MARILYN: (*Shrugs.*) There's no one else to talk to. So why not my stomach? Better than being alone.

JIM: I'm sorry, Marilyn. I wanted to make it till I was a hundred. I tried.

MARILYN: Yeah. But you wouldn't want to be in a nursing home, would you?

JIM: No. Never.

MARILYN: I figured that. That was my one comfort when . . . (*Sighs.*) It's hard to believe, huh?

JIM: What?

MARILYN: That you're gone. That you're really gone. Everywhere I look . . . all the ornaments . . . and photographs on the wall . . . the bottles in the medicine cabinet and the way I can't sleep but on one side of the bed. Reminders. All reminders. I pulled out that small bulb tree and started to put it up this year and remembered we bought that our first Christmas together.

JIM: Yep. It was kinda pricey if I remember right.

MARILYN: Oh yeah, we paid a pretty penny all right.

JIM: Oh yeah. How much was that now again?

MARILYN: A dollar. (*They laugh.*) My grandmother was horrified by how much we spent.

JIM: Well, a dollar was a lot back then.

MARILYN: My aunt bought that delicate set of elf ornaments that Christmas for us too. Only one's made it. I remember how each of them broke. I look at that one elf and can't help but think of myself . . . dangling . . . at the end of my branch. Anyway, I should try to block you out and go to sleep.

JIM: No, you can't. I came here to talk to you about something. To get you to see something.

MARILYN: No, please. I don't want to talk about these things.

JIM: I think we should.

MARILYN: I was so good, Dad. This whole time. We had everyone in for Christmas and we celebrated the next few days too, and I held it together. I didn't cry. You know?

JIM: You don't have to hold it together for them, Mother! It's okay to cry, to lose control.

MARILYN: No, it's not. Not for me! But you never had any trouble with that. You cry at the drop of a hat.

JIM: Is there anything wrong with that?

MARILYN: No. I'm glad I married such a sensitive man.

JIM: Are you? I mean, were you? You didn't have regrets?

MARILYN: None! Don't be ridiculous! You were wonderful. I mean, sometimes you'd go overboard. I'd look over and you were crying at some dumb commercial for long distance phone service.

JIM: It was probably moving.

MARILYN: Yes. It probably was. Still . . . *(Beat.)* Sarah pulled out the old slides and family movies this afternoon and we . . . I thought I was holding it together well . . . but those slides of the kids—when all of them were little and when we were so young I . . . you were handsome and . . .

JIM: Did they make you cry?

MARILYN: No. I just wished to hell I was back there. Even for a moment. I don't remember enjoying it enough, Jim. I don't remember taking it in back then. Taking in and feeling how lucky we were to love each other so much. How lucky to have such wonderful, precious children—all of them so precious . . . All those years of yelling at them to clean up their rooms and "help me with the dishes you crummy kids." I just wanted them back . . . so that I could feel what it was like for one second to have us all be together again. *(Pause.)* But that's a dream.

JIM: So why didn't you let yourself cry? Don't you think our kids would have comforted you?

MARILYN: There's no point in feeling sorry for yourself. You got to get up and move on or you'll fall into a funk. Things change. Kids grow up. We get old. People die. It's just the way it is. That's life.

JIM: You're not an orphan anymore, Mother. I know you always felt like you had to be extra good and extra brave. But none of us expected that Marilyn—not your grandma, or your aunts, or your children, or me.

MARILYN: Once an orphan, always an orphan, Jim. People leave you, wherever you are, without warning.

JIM: I didn't leave you.

MARILYN: Well what else would you call it?! There wasn't any warning!

JIM: I think there was some warning.

MARILYN: *(Angrily.)* Well, you could have given me more warning than you did! Telling everyone all the time, "I'm fine. I'm fine!" You can barely walk across the room or make it to the toilet, but you tell everyone—even the doctor—even the emergency wagon.

JIM: I wasn't lying! I did feel fine.

MARILYN: Like fun you did! I cared for you that night. You were in a lot of pain. From top to bottom. I said, "Do you want to go to the hospital?" "No!" you say, "I'm fine." I'd ask, "How do you feel?"

JIM: With my fingers.

MARILYN: Ahh Jim! Always having to be clever. I knew it was a bad idea to get that test when you were right out of the hospital. But I didn't listen to myself.

JIM: But Dr. Michaels wanted that test, Marilyn.

MARILYN: It was stupid! It was so stupid of me! I shouldn't have let them do it. I should have known!

JIM: It wasn't your fault.

MARILYN: It took so much out of you. You were too weak for that. Back and forth to the bathroom. Nothing left in you. And then that night. What a nightmare! You just kept upchucking over and over. Over and over. I thought the soup had disagreed with you. *(Whining.)* I didn't know what to do, Jim.

JIM: I know. Nobody blames you. I certainly don't. You were the best doctor ever.

MARILYN: *(Getting more worked up.)* NO! Don't call me that! I don't deserve that! I didn't do things right. I called three different nurses. I called the emergency nurse line. I didn't know what to do. I should have called the EMS sooner. I know. And then you keep saying, "I feel fine! I'm fine!!" Well you weren't fine!!!

JIM: I did feel fine. I felt fine because I was with you.

MARILYN: Don't do that.

JIM: This is what I wanted to talk to you about. This is why I came.

MARILYN: I don't want to cry. I only cried once this holiday and it was only for a second and only in front of Lindsey. I hit my head on the kitchen cupboard. Isn't that stupid? I hit my head hard on the cupboard because it was left open. I remembered that I hadn't hit it since you were alive to leave the cupboard doors open. It just snuck up on me.

JIM: Things do sometimes. Even death. I didn't know I was dying. I didn't want to hurt you, or leave you, Marilyn. Never. I love being with you.

MARILYN: You know all those things about a person that irritate you? How you'd take two hours to eat breakfast, or watch the TV too loud or how you'd tap your fingers on the dashboard. All those irritating things? I miss them most of all. I long for them now. You were getting better when we brought you back from the hospital. I know it! I shouldn't have—

JIM: It wasn't your fault!

MARILYN: I was sitting there today looking at those old slides. And I was furious at you. I kept thinking . . . you're the only one who knows my life without me having to retell it all. We could exchange everything in a look. How could you leave me? I was supposed to be taking care of you. *(Crying.)* And you didn't tell me you were going. You just let me be responsible, Jim. And then I had to make the decision at the hospital . . . an awful decision . . . I had to stand strong . . . I had to hold up the fort—

JIM: I know.

MARILYN: You don't know!! You haven't done it like me. My dad died when I was four. I never knew *her*. I had no one but my grandmother and then I had to watch her in the hospital . . . She insisted I put that damn tree up, but I had to go home alone and take it down so we could bring the body back for the viewing. Why did I let you go for that stupid test! Why?!!

JIM: *(Pause.)* My dying wasn't your fault. In fact, it was you who kept me alive for the last seven years. You didn't kill me. You saved me for seven years. And somewhere inside, you know it.

MARILYN: I don't know any such thing.

JIM: You did. And you did the same for your grandmother. You fed me, and nursed me, and showered me, and tucked me in bed, and picked me up off the floor. You cleaned me up when I'm sure it wasn't a fun thing to do. *(Beat.)* You loved me. And you saved me. I want you to know that and believe that. And don't ever forget it.

MARILYN: Well . . .

JIM: I wanted you to know that I trusted you enough to let you take over. And some day, when you really need it, Marilyn, our children will take care of you. And you will trust them. You aren't an orphan anymore. No one who raises six children is ever an orphan again. *(She nods.)* So . . . Do you want to sit here for a moment and just look at the Christmas tree lights? I like to do that. I like to think about all the years. You want to do that? *(She nods.)* Give me your hand, will you?

MARILYN: *(Holding out her hand.)* Oh Jim. It hurts. This . . . without you . . . I just wish . . . I just wish you . . . *(Crying.)* Well, you know. You know.

JIM: *(He nods gently, taking her hand.)* Yes.