

MINNIE & LIRAZ

By Lally Katz

ACT ONE

Scene One.

In the 'Recreation Room' of the Autumn Road Retirement Community Village a "Celebration of Life" (well really more like a funeral) is taking place. Autumn Road is a very well to do retirement village. It is all in one complex: the apartments, the pool, the gym, the dining room, the recreation and entertainment area. Some of the residents can still walk the long halls, but many use walkers, or those old people motorized scooters that you sit in. Most of the residents are quite wealthy and in their eighties and nineties. But there are the odd residents who moved in early and are only in their early seventies.

One of the attendants of Autumn Road Retirement Village, Norma, a woman in her 40's is speaking. Her body is slightly beaten by the years, but her face is still hopeful.

NORMA. Good morning ladies and gentlemen, residents of Autumn Road. We are gathered here together to celebrate the life of Mrs. Candice Dean. A wonderful woman, who will be missed by all of us here. She was a valued resident and friend to many of us and she undoubtedly touched all of our lives. In particular, I always so admired how Candice never complained. She had the most sunny disposition. Nothing ever got her down.

Minnie is sitting next to her husband, Morris, in the seats set aside for those watching the Life Celebration of Candice. Minnie is a well-kept woman in her early nineties. She has striking white hair. She wears beautifully made clothes, with a unique twist to them. Everything is handmade. Minnie tries to be polite in what she says, but there is often a twist or subtle criticism. Her husband Morris is bald and his posture isn't what it once was. He wears giant hearing aids. And then over his ears he wears headphones, which are attached to a microphone. He holds his microphone up to whoever is speaking in the hope of catching something that they say. Morris, unlike Minnie, is outright critical.

Minnie and Morris speak during Norma's speech.

MINNIE. It's funny when someone dies how people say only nice things about them.

Morris doesn't hear her. Norma continues speaking.

NORMA. In our time of grief we must take comfort that her children, her grandchildren and her many great-children will carry her legacy into the future.

MINNIE. What will my legacy be? All we have is one Grandchild. Not one single great grandchild. Our line is going to be discontinued. Without great grandchildren there is no future...

NORMA. One of the things I'm going to miss most of all about Candice was following her adventures on the Instagram account her great grandson Ashley set up for her. It's hard not to cry when thinking about all those tulips. Something about Candice's portrayal of Tulips just gets to me.

MINNIE. Do you have the Instagram Morris?

MORRIS. Where the bloody hell would I get it from?

NORMA. On a down note in a life of high notes, Candice had a lot of pain in right her hip. She'd had a surgery replacing that hip in 2003. And then another surgery replacing her left hip in 2005. That one held well. But in 2007 she needed her right hip replaced again.

Morris turns his microphone from facing Norma to face Minnie.

MORRIS *(to Minnie)*. You should say something. You always speak so clearly.

MINNIE. I don't speak clearly- I yell.

MORRIS. Tell? Tell me what?

MINNIE. Yell!

He laughs. She does too.

NORMA. Now, this is a traumatic surgery. But she took it in her stride. As best she could.

But there was a slight hole that had formed in the flesh around the artificial hipbone and that hole was not closing up.

MORRIS. Well you should yell something. You knew her better than anybody else.

MINNIE. What was there to know?

MORRIS. True. But she was your Bridge Partner for forty-seven years.

NORMA. But again Candice recovered her health. And we must credit her dedication to her swimming for that. And though it's tempting, we must not blame her swimming for the heart attack that she eventually suffered and drowned from in the pool.

Morris holds his microphone up towards where Norma is speaking. Norma is trying not to be distracted by their talking.

MORRIS. With no lifeguard on duty! They're letting this place go, scrimping and saving everywhere they can. I know they've been using frozen blueberries instead of fresh ones. And now this. Autumn Road will have to lift its game now. How many more deaths will it take?

Norma approaches them. It is obvious that she has come to politely ask them to be quiet.

NORMA. Is there something you'd like to say Mr. or Mrs. Cohen? I notice you both seem very vocal.

MORRIS. Minnie?

MINNIE. No. I didn't prepare anything.

NORMA. Well you can just speak from the heart.

MINNIE. Oh that never works.

MORRIS. I've got a question. With all this new-fangled Instagram technology these days, how is it there's not a security camera in the swimming area?

On the far side of the Dining Room, Liraz Weinberg, in her nineties, comes in riding a motorized scooter. It goes very, very slowly. Liraz stands out in a crowd. She is bubbling with energy. Her eyes are bright and wide. She is dressed in slightly garish clothes, a lot of shining gold. She wears costume jewelry from every decade.

Norma, Morris and Minnie don't see her yet.

NORMA. The pool was closed at the time of Candice's death-

MORRIS. Well with the fees here there should be security cameras if you ask me. It's just common sense.

NORMA. I'll make a note of that for The Board. Won't you speak Mrs. Cohen?

MINNIE. No, I hate being the centre of attention.

NORMA. It would be wonderful to hear you speak of all the Bridge tournaments that you and Candice came so close to winning.

MINNIE. No one wants to hear about second place.

Norma gives up and continues.

NORMA. Candice was also a very enthusiastic Bridge player. And in these last months she also joined the Memoir Group, which as you all know I facilitate here at Autumn Road. All of us who attend Memoir Group will long remember Candice's touching account of the tadpole she found in a rainwater puddle as a girl. I'm sorry if there's more emotion in my voice than you're used to at life celebrations. It's just that I was actually taken quite off guard by Candice's death. Usually I can tell when someone's time is up. You get pretty good at picking them, some of the other staff and I have little wagers going on who will go when, and I always win. Always. Because no one knows the residents like I do. No one. But Candice, her death really

blindsided me. It's not usual that I would lose to one of the part timers, to Angela, the girl with the neck tattoos, to be specific. But now's not the time for me to be prideful. It's just Candice seemed as though she was still so full of life. Thank you for attending today. I'm sure Candice would be very touched.

She finishes and people begin to file out.

MORRIS. What time is Rachel coming?

MINNIE. She said late morning. But knowing her that means the afternoon.

MORRIS. She takes after her grandmother.

MINNIE. When I die, they'll be able to say the late Minnie Cohen and be right on both counts. Oh did you read that article in The Age? We should show it to Rachel.

MORRIS. I really think you should stop giving Rachel articles about freezing her eggs. Maybe she's had enough of children with her work.

MINNIE. She's running out of time. We all are. Do you think Gabriel is worried? Doesn't he want to be a grandfather?

MORRIS. Who knows.

Morris looks up. He sees Liraz. He groans.

MORRIS. Whatever you do, don't look now. Liraz.

Minnie looks up.

MINNIE. Where?

MORRIS. I said don't look!

MINNIE. I can't help it.

LIRAZ. Yoo hoo Minnie!

MORRIS. Fantastic. She's spotted us.

From across the room, Liraz, on her scooter comes slowly and purposefully towards Morris and Minnie. She's grinning, very friendly.

Morris moans.

LIRAZ. Hello there Morry!

MORRIS. Dammit. We're trapped.

Morris turns away, without answering.

LIRAZ. How are you Minnie?

MINNIE. Fine-

LIRAZ. I'm so pleased to see you. You're looking well.

MINNIE. Hardly.

LIRAZ. How do I look?

MINNIE. Um... Well.

LIRAZ. Do I? Well thank you! I feel it. Ha ha ha!

Minnie smiles, witheringly.

LIRAZ. I've been wanting to talk to you ever since Wednesday!

MORRIS. We were just leaving Liraz.

Liraz laughs good-naturedly.

LIRAZ. Hold your horses there Morry!

MORRIS. I detest the nickname Morry.

LIRAZ. Oh come on Morry! Nicknames are a sign of endearment!

MORRIS. That's what I detest about them.

He turns back around.

LIRAZ. What a card. Speaking of cards, Minnie, like I was saying, I've been trying to track you down since Wednesday.

MINNIE. Why Wednesday?

LIRAZ. Well that's when poor Candice died.

MINNIE. Oh yes. Of course. Poor Candice.

LIRAZ. Well as soon as I heard I just knew that we had to talk. Because now, after all these years, you're partnerless.

MINNIE. Well I'm not thinking about that right now-

LIRAZ. Of course, of course, you're grieving. But you know what they say, Bridge is like sex. If you don't have a good partner, you better have a good hand!

Liraz laughs and slaps her knee. Minnie looks away, offended.

LIRAZ. Candice was a beautiful, kind woman. But we both know she wasn't exactly a genius when it came to Bridge.

MINNIE. She was steady.

LIRAZ. But you're better than steady. You're something special. I've played against you for fifteen years. You're a spectacular strategist. Precise, smooth and elegant. You always know when to finesse. And when not to. And you know I'm good. No one has my killer instinct.

MINNIE. Well I notice we're throwing modesty out the window.

LIRAZ. Modesty gives me a pain in the ass. And this rump has enough trouble as it is. Any day that I go is a good day.

MORRIS. Oh for Pete's sake.

LIRAZ. I say it like it is. I'm the only one in all of Autumn Road Retirement Village who is your match Minnie. You know that.

MINNIE. There's a lot of factors that go into a Bridge partnership- skill is only one of them-

LIRAZ. You and I together could win the Autumn Road Championship. Easily.

MINNIE. I really just play for social reasons-

LIRAZ. But it's not the Autumn Road Championship I'm here to talk about. It's the... Nationals.

MINNIE. You don't mean the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup?

LIRAZ. You got it.

MINNIE. Well I never even dreamed....

LIRAZ. Well you should have.

MINNIE. But the competition would be fierce...

LIRAZ. So we would we...be.

Minnie allows herself for one moment to see it.

MINNIE. Imagine if we won... *(She gets control of the fantasy.)* Well like I said, I'm not really thinking about Bridge right now.

LIRAZ. The heck you aren't. And if you're not, you should be.

MINNIE. We're at the funeral – well, life celebration of a dear, dear woman.

LIRAZ. This is bigger than life and death. This is Bridge.

MINNIE. I just need a little time to think Liraz. Anastasia died a month ago and you didn't rush into getting a new partner.

LIRAZ. Believe me, if the right one had've been free, I woulda jumped. And Anastasia would have wanted me to. Anastasia never had the killer instinct. She held me back in life, she wouldn't have wanted to hold me back in her death. No. Bridge is a game for the living. And you and me Minnie, we are both still, very much living.

MINNIE. Well 'very much' is a little strong isn't it Liraz?

LIRAZ. I feel more alive now than I did when I was 20. Because now, finally, I know what I want. I want to be a winner. We were an obedient generation of women, weren't we? A lifetime of serving bad tempered husbands and ungrateful children. Well that's not who Liraz Weinberg really is. When I die, I want my ashes kept in the trophy of the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup. On my grandson's mantelpiece.

MINNIE. But Liraz, what makes you think either of us will even live until the Australian National Seniors Championship Cup?

LIRAZ. It's a month away. If we set our hearts on it, we can make it to then.

MINNIE. Like I said, today's not really a day for Bridge decisions. Let me sit on it, won't you?

LIRAZ. For how long?

MINNIE. At least until tomorrow.

LIRAZ. Tomorrow morning? In the dining hall? At breakfast?

MINNIE. Morris and I only ever have breakfast in our room.

LIRAZ. I know.

MINNIE. Unless we've got visitors. Then we do book for the brunch.

LIRAZ. I'll find you.

MINNIE. Don't. Don't trouble yourself. I'll find you.

Liraz takes Minnie's hand. She squeezes it too hard.

LIRAZ. This is our chance Minnie.

Liraz leans down and yells into Morris's microphone.

LIRAZ. See you soon Morry!

Morris jumps.

MORRIS. Jesus!

Liraz rides out with determination, slowly.

MORRIS. Her, I can hear. What a cruel world. You're not going to be her partner, are you?

MINNIE. I don't think I could stand to. Though she is good...

MORRIS. It's not worth it. You'd end up hating Bridge. Let's enjoy the time we have left.

MINNIE. You're right.

They begin to leave.

MINNIE. You know what I would have liked to say about Candice; our last game. Candice should have played a small heart. The opponents led the ten; she covered with the Jack but she should have played small from the table.

MORRIS. It's over now.

MINNIE. That awful Liraz Weinberg would've played small from dummy, and then, we would have taken the Jack, the Queen and even the Ace.

Scene Two.

Morris and Minnie's apartment in Autumn Road. A tasteful apartment, full of unique and beautiful things. Everything in there has been brought from their former home and it still has the feel of a stately house. Morris is napping on the couch. Minnie is looking at photographs at the table. Rachel, their granddaughter comes in without knocking (there's no point). She is about 38 years old. She stands in the doorway, looking at her grandfather sleeping. She walks over to him and puts her hand on his forehead gingerly.

Minnie calls out.

RACHEL. Pop-op!

MINNIE. He's not dead. Just sleeping.

RACHEL. It's hard to tell. He scared me.

MINNIE. Oh that's nice. That it frightened you. That means you don't want us- or at least him- to die.

RACHEL. Jesus Baba. Of course not.

MINNIE. Well you'll stand to gain a bit when the time comes.

RACHEL. I hate when you talk about the Will. Can we have one visit where we don't dwell on your coming deaths?

MINNIE. You're right. I'm sorry. But I am turning 90 in just one month. But let's not focus on my imminent death. Especially when you look so well. Just look at you! You're so- sturdy!

RACHEL. Thanks.

MINNIE. You don't look a day over 38.

RACHEL. I am 38.

MINNIE. You fixed your skin. You had splotches last time I saw you.

RACHEL. They're still there.

MINNIE. They're not- I can't see a thing- oh yes. But fainter. It just looks like you've been slightly over enthusiastic with blush.

RACHEL. The doctor said it's a nervous condition.

MINNIE. You've never seemed nervous to me. You've always seemed very confident. I mean you're the principal! That's confident. You have everything at your fingertips.

MINNIE. What's prompted this visit?

RACHEL. I visit every Saturday.

MINNIE. Is there some big news we wondered? Has she met a man your grandfather asked? Perhaps there's some kind of big announcement?

RACHEL. No Baba. Not since last week. There's more to life than marriage announcements. I wish you'd ask me about my work more-

MINNIE. I forgot how much of a feminist you've become.

RACHEL. Become? You know feminist just means equal to men, don't you?

MINNIE. But sometimes I worry you take it too far. I mean you're already the principal.

RACHEL. So what if I'm the principal?

MINNIE. Well you're already the boss. You don't have to keep trying so hard to prove a point.

RACHEL. I'm not proving a point. I'm living my life.

MINNIE. Work is not life. Family is life.

RACHEL. You used to be proud that I'm a principal.

MINNIE. I'm still proud. I'm just reminding you of other areas you seem to have forgotten.

RACHEL. And what makes you think I've forgotten these areas?

MINNIE. Have you?

RACHEL. I most certainly have not.

Rachel takes a deep breath.

MINNIE. Finally, after all this time, we get a visitor and it's just so you can parade around my lack of meaning in the world.

RACHEL. How is my not getting engaged since last week parading around your lack of meaning in the world? And I visit once a week. Every week. Without fail.

MINNIE. We appreciate you putting yourself out for us.

MINNIE. But I know. You feel bad because of your father. You've taken it upon yourself to be his representative. Because he never comes at all.

RACHEL. He lives on the other side of the world.

MINNIE. Conveniently.

RACHEL. He hates flights.

MINNIE. Does he hate telephones too? He hasn't called since you were young. That's a very long time ago now. If I didn't see you, I'd almost think I dreamt I had a son.

Rachel looks over to where the photo albums are out and open.

RACHEL. Oh Baba. How come you have all the old photos out?

MINNIE. I'm looking for inspiration for my Memoir group. Just trying to go back in time. I wish I could use the Instagram.

RACHEL. Why can't you? I could teach you how.

MINNIE. At thirty-eight? I need a ten-year-old to do it. Maybe I wouldn't need to look into the past so much if there were more hope for your future. *(She holds up a photo.)* You recognize this character?

RACHEL. My Dad?

MINNIE. Yes. That's Gabriel dressed for whale watching. He was always dressed for whale watching. Even inland. He remained hopeful.

Rachel looks closer at the photo. She laughs.

RACHEL. I like his little whale-watching hat.

MINNIE. I should have taken him to see them. One time we were on holiday in Eden, NSW and there were apparently whales migrating that we were told you could see from the beach. He begged us to go, but you see I'd already made plans to go play at their local Bridge club. I didn't even think to ask your grandfather to take him. No one thought of that kind of thing back then. Your father had a miserable afternoon at the Eden Bridge Club. And he never got to see the whales.

RACHEL. I'm sure Dad's not thinking about it now.

MINNIE. No. He never forgot it. I know it. It's funny the decisions you make in the moment. They seem so small at the time. And later they seem to be keys- to everything that's unraveled in your life.

RACHEL. You're being dramatic. Nothing's unraveled in your life.

MINNIE. I wonder if your father would visit us if I'd taken him to the whales that time?

RACHEL. Baba, stop torturing yourself.

MINNIE. I suppose we all have our whales that we chase.

MINNIE. I always thought that I would be a widow. Most of my friendships, my activities were based around keeping me occupied once I became a widow. Because the men die first. They're weaker in the long run Rachel. But no widowhood for me. I'm never going to have anything of my own.

RACHEL. I'm sorry to hear that. You must be very disappointed.

MINNIE. So many of the women here are widows and great grandmothers at the same time. They own their own lives and the future. Lucky. I read this article in *The Age* that I thought you might find interesting.

RACHEL. Another one?

Minnie gets up and brings the magazine over to Rachel. Rachel looks at it.

MINNIE. It's all about freezing your eggs for the single woman. Ideally you would have frozen your eggs in your 20's, when they were still fresh. Also, it's better to freeze them already fertilized- though I suppose the fertilization part is your problem in the first place. Hasn't science come such a long way? I've underlined the best bits for you.

RACHEL. Thank you.

MINNIE. Everyone's dying. I want our line to continue. It's a good line all in all. You're running out of time Rachel. And you're our only hope.

RACHEL. I wouldn't hold your breath.

MINNIE. Couldn't you at least go on some dates?

RACHEL. I went on an internet date. On Thursday night.

MINNIE. You do that?

RACHEL. Of course. I've been on many. Five times before when I've been early, the man hasn't shown up. But I worked out a plan this time. Just be a little late. Which as you know, is in my nature.

MINNIE. How rude! They just didn't show up-

RACHEL. Think about it Baba. They looked in, saw me sitting there and turned around and left. But this time I waited until he would be sitting there.

MINNIE. You kept him guessing! You enthralled him!

RACHEL. Ha. I went up and before I pulled the chair out, I said, 'Craig?' He looked up and said, 'But you don't look like your profile picture.'

MINNIE. But why did you send him a picture of your profile- it's your worst angle!

RACHEL. It's the picture you put on your profile page. I used a lot of light, shadow and make-up. Plus I've learnt how to pose in a very flattering way. I just look vague. That seems to work best with my features.

MINNIE. Well why didn't you look vague when you met him?

RACHEL. I was trying to. But I was nervous. But still, he didn't leave. We had three courses together.

MINNIE. Dessert even?

RACHEL. I just had some of his. I wanted to show him my intentions towards a healthy future.

MINNIE. I made some fudge for your arrival.

RACHEL. You promised you wouldn't.

MINNIE. Well if you ate in moderation then having a little fudge wouldn't hurt you!

RACHEL. Yes.

MINNIE. Did you like him?

RACHEL. He talked about himself a lot.

MINNIE. Don't they all?

RACHEL. Maybe. But I found a little of what he said interesting. Or I thought I could potentially find it interesting. If I invested in it.

MINNIE. Who paid for dinner?

RACHEL. What does it matter?

MINNIE. It matters.

RACHEL. He offered.

MINNIE. So?

RACHEL. Well kind of, but he was looking at the bill for such a long time that I decided to look too. And once I'd looked I had to insist on paying half.

MINNIE. Oh well.

RACHEL. Then he said, 'What are you up to now?' And I said I had no plans. And then I asked him what he was up to. And he said, 'I'm having an early night.'

MINNIE. Well that's okay. It's just the first date. There's obviously a lot of potential there.

RACHEL. He didn't try to kiss me. He didn't ask when we would see each other again. That was just it. He'd told me all he had to tell me about his life. He was satisfied. He went home. I walked to the train. And I hoped the whole train ride home that someone would just brain me. That someone would clobber the life out of my brain with some big club or a brick or their fist if it were hard enough. But no one did. So I went to work the next day. And now I'm here.

MINNIE. He might still call.

RACHEL. Baba.

MINNIE. It's just a matter of odds. You just have to wear down the odds. Until you meet a nice one. And then you'll have children and I promise I'll be a doting Great grandmother- anything I did wrong with your father, anything I've done wrong with you- I'll get it right with my Great Grandchildren.

RACHEL. Baba, it's not going to happen.

MINNIE. I just want you to be happy...

RACHEL. If you want me to be happy then you'd understand that dating is the thing that makes me unhappy.

MINNIE. What if I find you someone suitable?

RACHEL. That's ridiculous. How are you going to find me someone?

MINNIE. I'll work that out. I can't leave this world without my favourite grandchild reproducing.

RACHEL. I'm your only grandchild.

MINNIE. And my favourite. I can make this work-

Morris opens his eyes. He sits up, delighted.

MORRIS. Rachel! You're here!

RACHEL. Hi Pop-op!

He looks at Minnie.

MORRIS. What did she say?

Minnie yells back:

MINNIE. She said 'Hello Pop-op'!

MORRIS. Can you let her know?

MINNIE. Well you're right here.

MORRIS. It's easier if you do it until I get my hearing aide on.

Minnie turns to Rachel.

MINNIE. Your grandfather would rather just be called Morris now instead of Pop-op. He never liked Pop-op. He just tolerated it while you were young.

RACHEL. But he's/you've always been Pop-op.

He's put in his hearing aide.

MORRIS. I've always been Morris too. Just not to you. I want to finish up my life with a name I don't hate.

Scene Three.

It's dinnertime at Autumn Road. So about five forty-five pm in the evening. Morris and Minnie enter the dining room. They are greeted by Norma.

NORMA. Good evening Mr. and Mrs. Cohen.

Morris speaks to Minnie:

MORRIS. What did she say?

MINNIE. She said 'Good evening.'

MORRIS. Oh. Good evening Norma.

NORMA. Good evening.

Morris turns to Minnie again.

MORRIS. What did she say?

MINNIE. She said 'Good evening' again.

MORRIS. For Pete's sake why? She already said it. Now we've had to go through the whole rigmarole twice. Ask her what the special is.

NORMA. It's fish and mushroom.

Minnie to Morris:

MINNIE. It's fish and mushroom.

MORRIS. Oh for Pete's sake the two things I can't stand more than anything.

NORMA. I'm aware of how much you hate mushroom and fish Mr. Cohen, that's why I ordered it for tonight. Usually you two don't have dinner here on Saturday nights.

MORRIS. We wouldn't be tonight if Minnie hadn't of insisted.

MINNIE. I wanted a little razzle dazzle.

Norma leads them to their seat. She hands them two menus.

At that moment, a soft humming sound. Liraz is approaching, on her little motorized cart. Morris elbows Minnie.

MORRIS. Oh for Pete's sake.

LIRAZ. Well good evening there Norma.

NORMA. Whoa Liraz! I better not catch you drink driving! *(they laugh)* You looking for a table for one?

LIRAZ. No thanks Norma. I've got a hot date tonight. It's Saturday night...

NORMA. Oh Ichabod night! No wonder you're all dolled up!

LIRAZ. So when the handsomest young man you've ever seen comes in, send him over to my table. And then when my grandson turns up, send him over too. Ha ha ha!

Norma laughs with Liraz.

Liraz drives past Morris and Minnie.

LIRAZ. Hello there you two! You don't usually eat in the dining room on a Saturday.

MORRIS. And now I remember why.

Morris looks down at his menu. Minnie forces a smile.

LIRAZ. I've been looking all over for you Minnie, but you've been nowhere! Have you had a chance to think about my little proposition?

MINNIE. I told you to give me until tomorrow!

LIRAZ. We're not getting any younger.

MINNIE. There are some factors which I didn't remember earlier. Nancy Stein wanted to/

LIRAZ. Stein? Stein's no Bridge player. She's a gossip who hides behind her cards. You'll never even take the Autumn Road Tournament with her. Much less the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup.

MINNIE. Well even so, I have to do what I believe is fair.

LIRAZ. Don't say no to me Minnie.

MINNIE. I'm sorry Liraz, I just don't think it's going to work out.

LIRAZ. Of course it'll work out.

MORRIS. You can't bully her into it.

LIRAZ. Bully? I'm no bully Morry! Ha ha ha! I'm just assertive. You have to be when you're a widow. That's something you've never gotten to experience Minnie.

MINNIE. I may yet!

MORRIS. We'll have to let you go now Liraz because we're going to order our dinner.

LIRAZ. Well you go ahead and eat on up! I'll just be over here! Vroom! Vroom! Minnie, I'll come by tomorrow morning to discuss when we can begin practice.

MINNIE. I don't think there will be any practice-

LIRAZ. See you in the morning!

Liraz drives off and pulls up at her table. Norma comes over with two menus. She puts one where her grandson will sit and then goes to hand Liraz one.

LIRAZ. I'll just order for myself whatever the special is-

NORMA. It's-

LIRAZ. Don't tell me, I like surprises! You know my grandson's a fussy eater though. Better leave the menu for him.

NORMA. I know exactly what he'll order. You know nothing gets past me in this place. I'll go make sure we've got plenty of spinach.

Morris clears his throat.

MORRIS. We can order.

Norma doesn't notice and heads off to the kitchen.

MINNIE. She didn't hear you.

Ichabod comes in. He looks around the dining room. Ichabod has a handsome face, with beautiful skin and very dark hair. He has no fat, but there is something soft looking about him.

Minnie looks at Morris.

MINNIE. That can't be her grandson...

Norma comes back in and approaches him.

NORMA. The guest of honour has arrived!

Ichabod smiles shyly

ICHABOD. Good evening Norma.

Minnie hears and leans over to Morris.

NORMA. She's sitting just there, in the usual seat. And did you want to use our complimentary hand sanitizer before you eat?

Norma offers Ichabod a pump of a hand sanitizer kept at reception.

ICHABOD. Oh thank you, but-

NORMA. You've got your own.

Norma laughs kindly as Ichabod takes a little bottle of hand sanitizer out of his pocket. Ichabod smiles politely, but shyly back.

Norma leads Ichabod over to Liraz.

NORMA. Mrs. Weinberg there's a gentleman caller here to see you.

Ichabod approaches Liraz.

ICHABOD. Hi *Bobeshi*.

LIRAZ. Ichabod! My darling! It's been an eternity since last Saturday. And look, look how handsome you are!

He leans over to kiss her cheek and Liraz grabs him and kisses him over and over.

ICHABOD. I just look the same as always.

LIRAZ. Well you always look handsome. But this, this is too much. Tell me, how are you?

ICHABOD. I wanted to tell you *Bobeshi*, I've been reading the most exciting article about the RF Resonate Cavity Thruster. I mean if it were real it might mean interstellar travel was actually possible! But I don't see how it could be real unless it was shedding photons. Therotically it shouldn't work you see, it violates Newton's Third Law-

ICHABOD. I've lost you haven't I *Bobeshi*?

LIRAZ. No, I'm following. I'm following.

(Minnie speaks to Morris.)

Minnie shushes him.

ICHABOD. What did I just say?

Liraz thinks for a moment.

LIRAZ. You doing some sort of thrusting at work?

A second of silence and then he laughs. She joins him.

LIRAZ. It sounds like you're on the track of a big, exciting discovery.

ICHABOD. Oh no, that was just something I was reading about. But what I'm working on, is a solution to Einstein's field equations. Which would mean sometime in the future we could send photons- packages of light Bobeshi! And then one day we could actually communicate back and forth with a parallel universe! Imagine that Bobeshi! Communicating with another universe!

LIRAZ. What for? Do they even play Bridge in this other universe?

ICHABOD. They might! It means so much that you believe in my dreams Bobeshi. You're my best friend.

LIRAZ. As it should be. A grandmother should be her grandson's best friend. It's healthy.

MORRIS. Is Norma actually going to take our order tonight?

LIRAZ. You take after your Bobeshi. You see windows where others see walls. We might face scorn for our passions. But who in the history of this world ever accomplished anything by worrying about the rules? By playing it safe?

LIRAZ. You're my one true friend in this life Ichabod.

ICHABOD. And Bobeshi, you are mine.

From the other table, Minnie has been watching them. Morris is trying to get Norma's attention.

MORRIS. For Pete's sake if we don't order now we're going to miss the first wave and end up waiting for our dinner all night.

Norma sees him, smiles and comes over.

NORMA. And what will you be having tonight Mr. Cohen?

MORRIS. My wife will have the spaghetti-

MINNIE. But just a-

NORMA. Half portion?

Morris not hearing her, shouts above him:

MORRIS (*shouts*) Half portion.

MINNIE. Poor Norma. You know us all too well!

NORMA. And the chicken with no coleslaw and no mushrooms for you Mr. Cohen?

MORRIS. Pardon?

MINNIE. She asked if you're having the chicken.

MORRIS. Yes- with no coleslaw or mushroom.

MINNIE. She knows.

Norma goes over to Liraz and Ichabod.

NORMA. The special for you Mrs. Weinberg? And we've got plenty of spinach for you doc.

LIRAZ. Not the spinach. That's not enough for a growing boy.

ICHABOD. *Bobeshi* I am grown. I'm 36 years old.

LIRAZ. Men mature later in life.

ICHABOD. Trust me, I'm grown. (*He looks back to Norma.*) I'll take the spinach salad, please.

NORMA. Honestly, I already ordered it for you along with the special for your grandmother.

LIRAZ. Thank you Norma.

Norma leaves with their order.

LIRAZ. I don't have to worry about your appetite?

ICHABOD. Of course not *Bobeshi*. I just like to eat light at night so the food doesn't disturb my dreams. My best theories often come to me in dreams.

LIRAZ. I need you to keep your strength. I'm going to need you to be strong for the both of us. I have some news that I want to share with you. I found out a month ago. I needed time to get my thoughts in order. Before I burdened you with the news.

ICHABOD. What is it *Bobeshi*?

LIRAZ. Brace yourself my darling...

LIRAZ. It's bad news. I have a tumour.

ICHABOD. Is it terminal?

LIRAZ. I'm afraid it is.

ICHABOD. How long did they give you?

LIRAZ. I only have seven years left to live.

ICHABOD. So until you're 99?

LIRAZ. Yes.

ICHABOD. It's so unfair. Only 99. Isn't there something they can do? Chemo? Radiation? Surgery?

LIRAZ. I told them I'd do anything to fight for my life, but the doc said surgery would kill me before the cancer. I got a second and third opinion and they were all the same. So my days are numbered. Maybe you could find a cure in some parallel universe?

ICHABOD. I'm a physicist *Bobeshi*, not a medical doctor, but perhaps I should return to university and learn medicine...

LIRAZ. No. You must live your life. I'm sorry to break your heart with the news that your *Bobeshi* will never reach her 100th birthday. That you'll never have to struggle to find a cake that fits a hundred and one candles- while still tasting good.

ICHABOD. 101?

LIRAZ. The one is for luck! Luck!

ICHABOD. Well luck has certainly let us down with this news.

NORMA comes out carrying two plates.

NORMA. One special for you Liraz and the spinach salad for you Doctor.

Norma looks at them. Ichabod is dabbing his eyes.

NORMA. Are you two okay?

ICHABOD. I got sanitizer in my eye.

NORMA. Oh no, I'll get a tissue. I'm glad you used your own. We've got enough problems with complaints from residents since the pool death.

ICHABOD. Thank you.

Morris watches them.

MORRIS. How come they got theirs first? We ordered first.

MINNIE. Maybe they have the specials pre-prepared.

MORRIS. Yuck.

MINNIE. What a handsome young man her grandson is. And a doctor too.

Scene Four.

The next morning, in the ladies dressing room of Autumn Road. Liraz rides her scooter into the ladies' dressing room of Autumn Road. She's wearing a frilly bathing suit. Minnie is waiting in there, putting her swimming cap on, also in a frilly bathing suit. Liraz is surprised to see her. Minnie is not.

MINNIE. Good morning Liraz.

LIRAZ. Good morning Minnie! What an unexpected pleasure to see you here at this time of morning.

MINNIE. I always mean to come in early but then time gets away from me.

LIRAZ. Yes, the late Minnie Cohen is what all the ladies call you.

MINNIE. One day they'll be right on both counts.

LIRAZ. I like a dark sense of humour. What stroke do you do?

MINNIE. Dog paddle. Only ever dog paddle.

LIRAZ. Ha!

MINNIE. Mostly I just stand in the water and do exercises these days. What about you?

LIRAZ. I do the butterfly. Just kidding. Ha. That was my stroke when I was in my sixties and young. So I'm right in presuming you've come to talk about our partnership.

MINNIE. Let's not get into that straight away.

LIRAZ. But isn't that what you're here to discuss? Away from the commotion and the gossip of the dining hall?

MINNIE. Did you have a pleasant evening with your grandson? He seems like a charming young man.

LIRAZ. Utterly charming. He's my sunshine.

MINNIE. I know how you feel. Children are a disappointment. But Grandchildren are much more pleasant.

LIRAZ. Ha! You can say that again!

MINNIE. What's his name again?

LIRAZ. Ichabod.

MINNIE. Physics- that's what you said right? What a wonderful job. My granddaughter Rachel is the principal of a whole school. And your Ichabod, is he married?

LIRAZ. No, he's very shy. He likes his own company. And the company of his *Bobeshi* of course.

MINNIE. It's hard these days isn't it? No rules to stick by. None of the young people know what they're doing. They have to have these cruel computers put them on dates. I think it was better in the old days. When there were human matchmakers. I want my granddaughter to have someone that she can count on in life the way I've been able to count on Morris.

LIRAZ. Now back to Bridge-

MINNIE. I bid two *Hearts*.

LIRAZ. What do you mean?

MINNIE. Ichabod and Rachel.

LIRAZ. Ichabod doesn't play Bridge.

MINNIE. Neither does Rachel.

LIRAZ. Then what are you bringing them into it for?

MINNIE. I thought we could introduce them.

LIRAZ. Matchmakers huh?

MINNIE. Yes, isn't it a great idea?

LIRAZ. Ichabod is a very, particular type of person.

MINNIE. Well Rachel's not without her oddities.

LIRAZ. How old is Rachel?

MINNIE. 38.

LIRAZ. Ichabod is two years younger.

MINNIE. Two years isn't much.

LIRAZ. At 38 her biological clock will be under a lot of pressure.

MINNIE. I know...

LIRAZ. No. I don't think she'd be suitable.

MINNIE. But you haven't even met her.

LIRAZ. I was hoping Ichabod might be gay. Gay men tend to stay closer to the matriarchs in their life.

MINNIE. Well is he?

LIRAZ. Unfortunately, no. But I really don't think he's ready for a girlfriend.

MINNIE. Don't you want great grandchildren?

LIRAZ. What for? I don't like children.

MINNIE. But aren't you worried about your line continuing?

LIRAZ. No. The answer is no. No matchmaking. Now back to our partnership-

MINNIE. I urge you to reconsider.

LIRAZ. It's not worth it to me. I'd rather have Ichabod available to me now, while I'm alive. After Bridge, he's the most important thing in my life.

MINNIE. What if you had to choose?

LIRAZ. What do you mean?

MINNIE. Let's just say if you were really serious about being my Bridge Partner, you would listen very carefully to what I'm suggesting.

Liraz looks Minnie square in the eyes.

LIRAZ. Are you giving me an ultimatum Minnie Cohen?

Minnie pauses. And then looks Liraz back in the eyes.

MINNIE. You're in a Diamond slam contract, WEST has made passive lead of trump. Pick your line!

LIRAZ. Avoid a Club loser with a cross to dummy and play Hearts and hope they break 3/3. I can discard my losing Club on the fourth Heart.

MINNIE. Can you see a better line?

LIRAZ. A coup en passant? No. Strip and throw in.

MINNIE. There are an even number of HEARTS against you. The odds are low that they will break 3/3; it's more likely they will break 4/2; and it's 50% for the finesse. To be a good player you need to know how to finesse.

Liraz pictures it and is filled with excitement.

LIRAZ. Hhhh! Oh my Lord- I can combine my chances by testing whether the Hearts break first. And if that doesn't work . . .

The ladies are both growing more and more excited.

MINNIE. Rely on the finesse.

LIRAZ. Win the Diamond lead-

MINNIE. Draw Trumps. And see how they break. Can you see?

LIRAZ. I can. Can you?

MINNIE. Of course.

LIRAZ. Test the Hearts.

MINNIE. Rely on the Club finesse.

LIRAZ. And either way, win the slam. Make twelve tricks.

Liraz smiles at Minnie.

LIRAZ. You see! You see Minnie- together we're unbeatable! Together we really could take the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup.

MINNIE. If you are willing to make the match.

LIRAZ. I'll make the match but you have to promise to be my partner even if they don't take to each other. You're my Bridge partner for life.

MINNIE. We should have a trial first.

LIRAZ. No dice. We're Bridge partners 'til death do us part or nothing. I can't have you walking away if Ichabod's not interested in your granddaughter.

MINNIE. Okay, okay. But you have to try and make him like her.

LIRAZ. I have a lot of influence over Ichabod. But dare I use it just for the purposes of Bridge... Oh this is a difficult hand I've been dealt.

Norma comes in.

NORMA. Hello ladies. Ready for me to assist you into the pool Liraz?

LIRAZ. Thank you Norma. *(to Minnie.)* Once I'm in the water I float like a corpse. But on land, I can't even manage a step.

Liraz powerfully, but not without regret, holds out her hand to Minnie.

LIRAZ. Deal partner?

Minnie winces. And reluctantly takes Liraz's hand.

MINNIE. Deal.

Scene Five.

Minnie and Rachel approach the recreation room.

RACHEL. Baba are you going to tell me what is so urgent? You worried me calling like that- at work- that's strictly for emergencies. I thought maybe Pop-op- Morris- had died or something.

MINNIE. Not yet.

RACHEL. I'm actually the Principal- I can't just run out of the school on a whim. Baba tell me what is so urgently going on in the... Recreation Room?

MINNIE. Now try and put your vague look on.

RACHEL. What? Why?

MINNIE. Quick. Look vague and flattering.

RACHEL. Baba- I told you no!

But it's too late. Liraz and Ichabod are sitting at a table. Liraz is on her scooter. She looks at Rachel suspiciously. Norma is setting up cards.

MINNIE. Liraz! We're here!

LIRAZ. Good morning Minnie! And this must be your granddaughter...

Liraz has trouble addressing Rachel.

MINNIE. Rachel.

LIRAZ. Rachel.

MINNIE. The school Principal.

LIRAZ. Congratulations.

MINNIE. Yes, it's a very powerful, but feminine position. *(to Ichabod)* And you're the physicist right?

Ichabod nods shyly. He holds out his hand. Minnie takes it.

ICHABOD. How do you do?

MINNIE. Charmed. And this is my granddaughter Rachel, the school Principal.

LIRAZ. You mentioned that already.

Ichabod shakes her hand, but doesn't make eye contact with her. But Rachel is immediately drawn to him.

ICHABOD. How do you do?

RACHEL. Good thank you. And how do you do?

ICHABOD. Um. Yes. Fine.

LIRAZ. Should we get started?

Minnie smiles at Rachel and Ichabod.

MINNIE. It's very kind of the two of you to play with us. We need all the practice we can get for the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup.

RACHEL. Play?

Minnie elbows her.

RACHEL. Bridge? I don't know how to play Bridge.

ICHABOD. I've never played either.

MINNIE. Don't worry, we'll teach you.

LIRAZ. And it doesn't matter. We'll tell you what to do. We never have to play as a group again after today.

Minnie gives Liraz a look.

LIRAZ. The best way to start is if we just go ahead and play a hand. Now I'm dealer. Minnie is NORTH. Ichabod my darling you're EAST and- what is your name again-

MINNIE. Rachel!

LIRAZ. Rachel dear, you're WEST. Let's just start.

MINNIE. Ichabod maybe you could help Rachel sort her hand into suits?

LIRAZ. You've got to be kidding me.

ICHABOD. Oh yes. Of course.

RACHEL. I can do it but thank you.

LIRAZ. Let's play open-handed.

MINNIE. Liraz, you're dealer, you're first bid.

LIRAZ. Oh, I might have to pass. I don't have the suit quality for a pre-empt. I could pre-empt 2 Hearts; what are you bidding?

MINNIE. Okay, but straight away I can see what you're thinking and you're wrong - a complete mis-description of the playing value of the hand.

LIRAZ. But I don't have suit quality. And you're only thinking that because I underbid 3 Hearts instead of 4 Hearts against you in the 2004 Boxing Day game. And I was tired from the turkey.

MINNIE. We were all tired from the turkey.

LIRAZ. It was terrible and there was so little of it.

MINNIE. I miss that chef. There was always something to complain about when he cooked.

LIRAZ. I'll have you know if this were a real game I would probably start with 3 Hearts. I guess I do have 7 of them.

MINNIE. You're crazy. 3 Hearts isn't enough. You've got a 7/4 - you need to pre-empt 4 Hearts despite the poor suit quality.

Minnie and Liraz look closely at the cards. Ichabod and Rachel smile awkwardly at each other. Rachel steps away from the table. Ichabod follows awkwardly. Liraz and Minnie become lost in Bridge talk. Though Minnie is keeping a hopeful eye on Ichabod and Rachel. Liraz is at times keeping a wary eye on Rachel.

LIRAZ. My hand judgment with distributional hands needs work. I know that. But I just can't bring myself to bid 4 Hearts with no Heart Honours.

MINNIE. You're first seat favourable. This is a vulnerability. This should be automatic. The Ace, King, Queen to four Diamonds makes up for the poor Heart suit.

Minnie and Liraz write down different patterns of how the bids might play. Say, for example, 2No Trumps, 3 Clubs, 3 Hearts, 4 Hearts . . . meanwhile . . .

Rachel smiles at Ichabod awkwardly. She asks him.

RACHEL. So Ichabod, a physicist are you theoretical or experimental?

ICHABOD. Theoretical. Mainly...

RACHEL. Are you allowed to be both?

ICHABOD. Uh, not really.

RACHEL. So you're breaking the laws of physics?

ICHABOD. Ha ha. That's funny.

RACHEL. Thanks. A dad joke.

ICHABOD. Your father's?

RACHEL. No, just a dad style joke.

Liraz has grown impatient with Ichabod and Rachel talking.

LIRAZ: Ichabod darling, we're ready to play a practice hand now. Come over darling.

Minnie interjects.

MINNIE. Wait. You didn't think of something. You wouldn't be first to bid. West would be dealer.

LIRAZ. And West would bid 1 No Trump before my bid.

MINNIE. You could still pre-empt 4 Hearts after a 1 No Trump opening.

LIRAZ. A call of 4 Hearts after 1 No Trumps is far too risky, it's disastrous.

LIRAZ. Forget about bidding. Let's do a simple card play. Hearts as trumps. I'll lead.

They start to play.

Minnie goes from being tense to relieved. Rachel and Ichabod come back over and sit by the hands they've been dealt.

MINNIE. This is a fun way to play, the two of you should become partners and we could play all four of us.

LIRAZ. How do you know? We've only played one trick!

MINNIE. I'm having fun!

LIRAZ. I don't think there will be time for that anyway. Not before the tournament.

MINNIE. I mean just for fun. On the side.

LIRAZ. Ichabod is very busy with his physics.

ICHABOD. I can play. Any time I can get with my *Bobeshi* is good time for me.

RACHEL. Me too. I like learning new things. And this is more fun than learning Mandarin. That was a lot of work for a hobby.

ICHABOD. Wow- Mandarin. I only know Hebrew, Russian, German, Japanese and Turkish. And conversational French and Spanish. I wish I spoke Mandarin.

MINNIE. Rachel could teach you!

RACHEL. Well I don't really speak it- just enough to have a polite conversation. It was just when I was on a hobby kick. I thought getting a hobby would change my life. But then all it did was make me feel inadequate and see all the other things I was lacking. That's what all hobbies are. Just reminders of everything that has gone wrong in my life and makes me want to cut my own throat in the bush and be found by a group of students on their Bronze Medallion hike.

MINNIE. Not everyone gets a dark sense of humour Rachel.

ICHABOD. Do you play an instrument?

RACHEL. No. I'm completely tone deaf.

MINNIE. Not completely...

Rachel pays no attention to Minnie.

RACHEL. You?

ICHABOD. I play the flute actually.

Rachel laughs again.

RACHEL. Oh. You're serious.

LIRAZ. What's funny about the flute? It's a perfectly good instrument.

RACHEL. I'd love to hear you play something some time.

ICHABOD. Really?

RACHEL. Of course.

LIRAZ. He's really very talented.

MINNIE. Why don't you play us something now?

RACHEL. Baba, he doesn't just carry his flute with him everywhere.

ICHABOD. As a matter of fact, I do.

RACHEL. You have your flute on you right now?

ICHABOD. Yes. It helps me think. I find music is very connected to theoretical physics for me. Whenever I'm stuck on a theory, wedged in a tight squeeze in outer space, I take my flute and play a little. And the music acts like a coat of grease. I'm no longer stuck.

MINNIE. Oh you must play us something!

Ichabod looks shy.

ICHABOD. Only if I'm not disturbing my Bobeshi's game. I know and admire how much concentration she puts into Bridge.

LIRAZ. Go ahead and play dear. Maybe if you do, there will be less chatter on the sidelines *(she gives Rachel a look)*.

ICHABOD. Well alright then.

Ichabod takes his flute from his jacket. He takes it out of its case. He puts it to his mouth.

RACHEL. Don't you need to stand up? Sorry- I don't know- why am I being bossy?

ICHABOD. It is better if I stand up. I just didn't want to make too big a deal.

MINNIE. Oh don't be silly, stand up.

Ichabod stands up. He begins to play the flute. It is beautiful. Towards the end of his playing, Morris comes in. He looks at the whole situation, very confused. He holds his microphone up to the group.

MORRIS. What the hell is going on here?

LIRAZ. Me and Minnie are going to be winners Morry.

MORRIS *(to Minnie)*. You didn't.

Liraz laughs loud. Ichabod laughs along with her. Morris turns and walks directly out.

Minnie looks at the others.

MINNIE. Morris's arthritis is acting up. Please excuse his bad mood.

MORRIS. My Arthritis is about the only thing I can depend on it seems.

Morris looks at Minnie. Shakes his head. And then begins to walk back out.

MINNIE. Morris!

RACHEL. Don't worry about him Ichabod. He can't hear it anyway. That was really very good. It was...beautiful.

ICHABOD. Thank you. I like music because it works its way around things. It doesn't have to use force. Sometimes the slipperiest things are the most powerful.

RACHEL. I like the way you think. More people should see the world the way you do.

ICHABOD. Thank you. What do you like about the world?

RACHEL. Oh. Um. That's a good question. I like going to the supermarket. I especially like those stores that are half pharmacy, half supermarket. Like Priceline.

ICHABOD. Actually, I rather like those too.

LIRAZ. Let's wind this up.

MINNIE. What's the rush?

LIRAZ. Norma, isn't there a Memoir Class in here soon?

NORMA. There is actually. Will you stay for it?

LIRAZ. Certainly not.

NORMA. I would so love to hear your story Liraz.

LIRAZ. My story's only just beginning. Now, this was a bad lesson all in all. But all things considering, we'll win the Autumn Road Tournament.

NORMA. You're staying for Memoir aren't you Minnie?

MINNIE. I'm going to have to give Memoir a little time off Norma.

NORMA. Oh. I thought you liked Memoir.

MINNIE. I do! I did! But I have responsibilities now. Now that Liraz and I are...partners.

Scene Six.

Minnie comes back into the apartment. Morris is waiting for her.

MORRIS. Why'd you do it? I can't believe you did it. Now we're stuck with Liraz Weinberg. It's like a nightmare. We've been married seventy years and I suddenly don't feel like I know you.

MINNIE. I did it for Rachel.

MORRIS. For Rachel? Who are you kidding?

MINNIE. So that she won't be alone.

MORRIS. She's not alone. She has plenty of friends. She has her father. Admittedly he's on the other side of the world, but he knows how to use the Skype. And she has us.

MINNIE. Well we won't be around much longer!

MORRIS. You did it for you. Because you're afraid of dying. But what you've actually done is you've ruined the rest of our lives.

MINNIE. Morris- you make me sound awful. And you're being over dramatic as usual! Ruined our lives? It's just Bridge. And I did it for Rachel-

MORRIS. You're afraid of not existing. And guess what baby, there's nothing you can do about it.

MINNIE. Don't you want our line to continue?

MORRIS. I want to enjoy the time we have left. Not spend it with Liraz Weinberg.

MINNIE. Well it's not like you have to be her partner.

MORRIS. Thank Christ for that. But just think about this- just think about this for one second. Just say Rachel and this flute playing character do hit it off. Then there's a family dinner for everyone. Next an engagement party. Then a wedding. I tell you if they get married and I have to sit at a table with Liraz Weinberg, then I'm finishing myself off. I swear.

MINNIE. I'll bet Gabriel would come to the wedding. He'd be at our table. I could reason with him then. Apologize about that whale thing. Maybe we could even take a family trip to the Eden? To see the whales? Oh- wouldn't that just be perfect?

MORRIS. Mark my words Minnie. Mark my words. This will end badly.

Interval.

ACT TWO.

Scene One.

It's the Autumn Road Championship. Ichabod and Rachel are sitting on some seats at the sideline. Minnie and Liraz make last minute preparations as she sings:

MINNIE. They seem to like each other, don't they? I mean they really get along well. They're odd. They're both odd. It's okay for me to say it about Ichabod because I'm saying it about Rachel too. Definitely odd. But you can imagine them really coming together.

LIRAZ. We need to focus. I'd like to go over ourstrong 2 bids. There's really only one team we have to worry about today.

MINNIE. Tina and Carol?

LIRAZ. Of course.

MINNIE. Though I wouldn't discount Jackie and Olive.

LIRAZ. And Rhonda is pretty good. But Harold isn't. Why does she play with him?

MINNIE. They've been married 70 years.

LIRAZ. Exactly.

They both laugh.

Norma. And now the Annual Autumn Road Bridge Tournament.

Norma sings the National Anthem and the game begins.

Rachel and Ichabod watch together.

RACHEL. They're very good, aren't they? Who would have thought watching Bridge would be such an engrossing thing to do on a Sunday afternoon? Oh your grandmother just played the two! Oh thank goodness- Baba played the King! They're a great team!

Ichabod is shyly looking at his thermos.

ICHABOD. Would you like some chicken soup? It's organic. And the chickens were free range. I brought a thermos.

RACHEL. How lovely. How come you brought chicken soup?

ICHABOD. It prevents me from getting sick. If I get sick I can't work.

RACHEL. You really think about your work a lot, don't you?

ICHABOD. Of course. Because it's everywhere. The universe is everywhere. I can't leave my work at the office, because I leave the office and there's the universe. Always reminding me of what I should be doing. I often feel... trapped in the universe.

RACHEL. Well you are. But it's quite large. Luckily.

ICHABOD. If you had the chance, would you leave this universe for another?

RACHEL. What would be in it?

ICHABOD. Well you can't know until you go there.

RACHEL. No. I don't think I would. But I wish I would. You?

ICHABOD. Of course! But I put physics before life. Anyway, your work must be everywhere too. People keep getting born, students always need to be taught. Do you find it hard to leave your work at the school?

Rachel pauses. Ichabod looks down at his thermos.

ICHABOD. Was that a strange question?

RACHEL. No. It's a good question. I just realized that not a lot of men I've met ask me questions. Or if they do it's just about things they're interested in.

ICHABOD. Well I'm interested in your work.

RACHEL. Yes. And I really appreciate it. Because of course, you're right. There are students everywhere! They're in adults too, I see the students in adults. Like everywhere I go I'm looking at people's inner child. It makes it difficult for me to deal with them as adults. I want to discipline them. But I also feel so sorry for them. But I don't seem capable of giving adults boundaries. Only children. And that's not fair. I should get angry at adults too.

ICHABOD. I don't want you to be angry with me.

RACHEL. I don't want to be angry at you either...But perhaps I should try harder to set boundaries with my grandmother. To be more honest in our relationship. She'd probably appreciate it in the long run. Most adults want to know there are parameters. We want to know what we're allowed to do. For instance, if I took your whole thermos of chicken soup and drank it all right in front of you, wouldn't you be angry?

ICHABOD. Oh that's right- the soup- I'm sorry- I offered and then I forgot-

RACHEL. But that wouldn't be polite if I did that and you would have to say to me, 'I didn't like how you drank all my chicken soup right out of my thermos in front of me.'

ICHABOD. I don't think I'd say that.

RACHEL. Me either. That's the problem. When I meet a difficult person, I think oh, perhaps you tested poorly in school or you weren't encouraged and I can't set boundaries because I feel sorry for them.

ICHABOD. Is that what you think about me?

RACHEL. No! I think you would have enjoyed being a student. You obviously enjoy learning. You might have found school a little lonely though.

ICHABOD. Because I didn't know how to socialize with the other students?

RACHEL. No. I'm sorry- no- because you love science- because you see it everywhere- it is your way of playing. That's how people learn. Through playing. Your way of playing is science. It frees you. It lets you open up where normally you would close. If people would just play science with you, then you would have wonderful relationships.

He stares at her. Smiles.

ICHABOD. I also like going on nature walks and to see the occasional film.

RACHEL. Of course- I'm not saying that's the only thing-I'm sorry-

ICHABOD. Do you?

RACHEL. Pardon?

ICHABOD. Do you like nature walks and seeing the occasional film? Particularly melancholy films.

RACHEL. Yes. I do. Like both. Very much. And the melancholier the better.

ICHABOD. That's good.

He looks at his thermos.

RACHEL. Maybe we could one time...

ICHABOD. Maybe if they don't need us to play Bridge next Sunday- if they need us then of course- but if they don't- maybe there's a melancholy film playing or if it's not raining a nature walk you'd like to go on?

RACHEL. Yes. Even if it's a raining- I mean a nature walk in the rain would be beautiful!

Morris comes in, wearing his hearing aide again. He looks where they are looking at the game.

MORRIS. For Pete's sake.

He shakes his head and walks slowly off. Rachel smiles at Ichabod. He smiles shyly back, then looks down.

RACHEL. Well should we write down our numbers for each other?

ICHABOD. Just tell me yours. I'll remember it.

RACHEL. Okay it's 0406 679 225. Should I repeat it?

ICHABOD. No. I've got it.

RACHEL. Should I give you my work number and my home number in case my phone gets stolen or something?

ICHABOD. That's probably a sound idea.

RACHEL. Should I write them down?

ICHABOD. No, if you tell me that will do.

RACHEL. Work is 8325 7589.

ICHABOD. Yes and home?

RACHEL. 9417 3254

ICHABOD. I will contact you on your mobile 0406 679 225 this week and if that fails I will then try work during business hours on 8325 7589. And if that fails I will try your home number 9417 3254 before or after business hours.

RACHEL. That sounds perfect.

Minnie and Liraz come over and join them. Minnie walks, Liraz is on her motorized scooter as always. Liraz looks down.

LIRAZ. If you had've played the spade in the 6 HEART contract than I could have auctioned.

MINNIE. You're right. But in the 3 no trump contract you should have played your queen.

LIRAZ. I suppose I should have. And we'll have to do better on our finessing next time. We played terribly.

MINNIE. Yes we did.

NORMA comes over, carrying a small trophy.

NORMA. You won! Ladies, your trophy. Champions of the annual Autumn Road Bridge Tournament. Well played.

She holds it out to them.

RACHEL. Wow congratulations!

ICHABOD. Well done Bobeshi. Well done Mrs. Cohen.

MINNIE. Please call me Minnie.

RACHEL. Great work Baba! Great work Liraz!

LIRAZ. Mrs. Weinberg is fine dear.

Minnie pushes Norma's hand with the trophy towards Liraz on her scooter.

MINNIE. You should take it Liraz.

LIRAZ. This one? This one means nothing to me. In fact, I don't want it hanging around giving me a false sense of security. Our game wasn't nearly as strong as I imagined it would be.

MINNIE. We may never get those cards again.

LIRAZ. At our age, no way. And we could have played them better. Take it back Norma.

NORMA. What do I do with it?

LIRAZ. Save it for next year.

NORMA. But it has the date on it.

LIRAZ. Don't worry. No winner here will be able to read print that small.

She leaves with the trophy.

RACHEL. But it's brilliant that you won.

LIRAZ. We'll have to play a lot better than that if we want to even have a chance at Australian National Seniors Championship Cup. Agreed Minnie?

MINNIE. Oh definitely. Agreed.

Minnie and Rachel leave together. Rachel and Ichabod give each other a little wave.

Rachel and Minnie leave. Liraz looks at Ichabod.

ICHABOD. You seem concerned about the game Bobeshi.

LIRAZ. Yes... The game.

ICHABOD. But you won!

LIRAZ. Wasn't it dramatic in the third round when I made the Advance Sacrifice?

ICHABOD. Yes Bobeshi. Very!

LIRAZ. Well I never did. That was a test to see if you were watching. But you weren't obviously. You were preoccupied with that woman. And now you've been dishonest with your Bobeshi.

ICHABOD. Oh come on Bobeshi, what's a little dishonesty other than politeness?

LIRAZ. But we've never been polite with each other. Only honest and loving! Honesty is everything.

ICHABOD. Rachel and I did talk much more than I expected.

LIRAZ. Do you... Like her?

ICHABOD. Well, we have a lot in common.

LIRAZ. She's 38.

ICHABOD. Yes, I would have guessed that.

LIRAZ. You could practically hear her biological clock ticking!

ICHABOD. They say that about women in their thirties.

LIRAZ. And that doesn't bother you?

ICHABOD. Why should it Bobeshi? I'm not a woman in my thirties.

Scene Two.

It's late at night. Minnie is sitting up alone, looking through photographs. Morris comes out. He watches her.

MINNIE. Did I wake you?

MORRIS. No.

MINNIE. Liar.

MORRIS. My dream woke me. My dreams always wake me when you get up. Remember after we first got married?

MINNIE. And you'd always catch me sneaking fudge in my nightgown at midnight.

MORRIS. In the kitchen with all the lights off. You didn't have to keep it a secret from me.

MINNIE. I was trying to keep it a secret from myself.

MORRIS. But there I'd be, turning the lights on, calling out 'Minnie? Minnie?' I would have an awful moment where I'd wake up and think you left me.

MINNIE. No you didn't. You didn't really think that.

MORRIS. Every time. Even tonight for a split second.

MINNIE. I would never have left you.

MORRIS. You've tolerated me very well.

MINNIE. Well you've tolerated me well too.

They smile at each other. Morris looks at the pictures Minnie's looking at.

MORRIS. I love this picture of Gabriel.

MINNIE. What a little spirit. Maybe things would have been different if I'd breastfed.

MORRIS. Formula was the thing at that time.

MINNIE. But other women still did it. The truth is, I didn't want to. It seemed kind of awkward... It seemed too intimate. That's funny isn't it? To have that feeling with your own child.

MORRIS. You never showed it.

MINNIE. He felt it.

MORRIS. Rachel's so serious in this picture.

MINNIE. That's just before they moved.

MORRIS. She didn't want go. I think she missed us a lot.

MINNIE. Ha.

MORRIS. Remember she used to write to us.

MINNIE. Thank you letters for birthday checks.

MORRIS. Well she moved back.

MINNIE. For work. Not for us.

MORRIS. Since when does a grandchild do anything because of their grandparents. She has to have her life.

MINNIE. Sometimes I really wish I could do the whole thing over. That I could start again. Not with my life. Not with you. Just with Gabriel. I wish I could be a mother all of over again. I wish I could have more children. Maybe with more children it flows better.

MORRIS. You only wanted one.

MINNIE. But I was young then. I didn't know.

MORRIS. Let's go to sleep.

MINNIE. I'll stay up a little longer.

MORRIS. Then I'll stay up with you.

MINNIE. Don't. I need to practice for being a widow.

MORRIS. It's not going to happen.

She slumps. He sits down with her.

.

Scene Three.

Rachel and Ichabod sit, while Minnie and Liraz sit looking at cards at another table.

NORMA. How's it going ladies?

MINNIE. We might just win this you know Norma.

LIRAZ. Don't count our chickens too early.

Norma goes over to Ichabod and Rachel.

NORMA. It's so nice how the two of you are here often now. I know it makes your grandmother's very happy.

RACHEL. Yes.... Our grandmothers.

Morris comes in, surveys everyone and shakes his head. He approaches Rachel and Ichabod.

Norma smiles at Morris as he comes in.

NORMA. Good morning Mr Cohen!

MORRIS. Morning? It's afternoon.

NORMA. I always lose track of time here!

MORRIS. Why do you always have to be so cheerful Norma?

NORMA. Because I'm happy. Something's amiss with you, isn't it Mr Cohen?

MORRIS. Talk about intuitive.

He walks slowly past her, up to Rachel.

MORRIS. Rachel, will you join me for lunch?

RACHEL. I can't right now Pop-op- Morris. I'm talking with Ichabod.

MORRIS. Enthralling.

ICHABOD. You're welcome to join us. *(He continues talking to Rachel)*. We're discussing the film we saw last week *The Lonesome Waitress*. What I particularly liked in the plot was when the main character Abigail was very sad, but still had to continue with her day to day life. I thought that was very realistic.

RACHEL. I agree. And when she began to write her poetry even though no one would ever read it, it was so depressing. Which I found very uplifting.

MORRIS. Oh gimme a break.

He walks away. They don't notice.

ICHABOD. I couldn't agree more! It was a very meloncholy film.

RACHEL. Very.

ICHABOD. It's meant to be raining tomorrow.

RACHEL. Oh perfect weather for another nature walk!

Morris walks over to Minnie and Liraz.

MORRIS. Minnie, are you joining me for lunch?

MINNIE. I can't sorry Morris. You know the Australian National Senior's Championship is tomorrow. We're working on our finessing tactic.

MORRIS. I've been having lunch on my own for weeks.

LIRAZ. Nothing sadder than a Bridge widower huh Morry?

MORRIS. For Pete's sake! Don't call me Morry!

He swipes the cards on the table onto the floor.

Liraz gasps.

LIRAZ. Morry! What's the matter with you?

MINNIE. Morris, please!

Norma approaches Morris.

NORMA. Mr. Cohen, I notice you're at a loose end. Memoir Group is starting shortly. Why don't you come?

MORRIS. I'd rather die.

NORMA. Why are you all so prejudiced against Memoir Group? It's really a very enlightening process. You come to understand your lives in a whole different way. To be honest, I could really use the extra numbers...

MORRIS. Fine. You win. I'll come.

Scene Four.

Norma stands up in front of the Memoir Group. Which consists of Morris.

MORRIS. Extra numbers? It's just me.

NORMA. That's good because we can really focus on you and your story. Why don't you read it outloud?

MORRIS. Read what outloud?

NORMA. Your memoir chapter.

MORRIS. I haven't written anything.

NORMA. Well why don't you improvise? It's your life. You know the story.

MORRIS. I haven't done anything interesting in years.

NORMA. Well, go back to when you were interesting.

MORRIS. I haven't been interesting since the war.

NORMA. A war story is perfect for Memoir Group. There's nothing wrong with the everyday and the personal, but honestly, most war stories are usually really good. Something about the life or death stakes just keeps everything crisp and interesting. Except for when Mr. Jacobs was in the class. How he turned stealing that boat from the Nazi's into a boring story, I will never know. Now, why don't you do an oral re telling of your story and then I'll give you a writing exercise afterwards based on it.

MORRIS. All right. It was near the end of the war. We had the taste of home on our lips. But there was still one more battle that had to be won. The other side had the hill. And we had to take it before nightfall. They outnumbered us ten to one. But we had the surprise element on our side. I lay on my stomach in the brambles. I breathed in dirt. I could smell my own blood in my veins. And I prayed it stayed in there. By now I'd killed dozens of men. I had a particular skill for it. I wouldn't say that I enjoyed it, but I did take satisfaction in a job well done. In a nice clean shot to the head or the heart. Nothing messy. I'd had luck and speed on my side. But I was tired now. And I had a sprain in my knee. As I came snaking up the hill, the sun glowing orange gold in the setting sky, I saw him. The Captain. He was standing, almost entirely hidden behind a tree. The only reason I could see him was his sword was catching the orange, pink of the sunset. It glowed slightly as he held that in one hand and his gun in the other. He was waiting for me. He could feel my presence. But he couldn't see me. I pulled myself along on my stomach thinking of Minnie, the girl I'd met who told me not to think of her. Once I was behind him, I stood up. At that moment, he turned around. His sword held high in the air. His gun pointed at my heart. He was a man of dignity. I shot his heart first. And I took his sword... I went home, found Minnie and convinced her to marry me. We had a son. Who moved far away. When we moved out of our house into this so called luxury retirement village where people drown in the pool and they serve mushroom constantly, which I detest, one of the movers stole

the Captain's sword. I'd kick the bucket now if I could, but I have to outlast my wife. I can't leave her alone with the estate. She's never paid a bill in her life. She doesn't know where all the documents are. She doesn't know anything about the investments or the bank accounts. So I have to hold on, living, chewing food that tastes like saw dust. I can't do any of the things that made my life enjoyable or worth living.

NORMA. Wow. That was a very powerful story. How does it feel to have opened up and shared like this?

MORRIS. Surprisingly... Good.

Scene Five.

Minnie and Liraz finish up practice.

LIRAZ. You better get a good night's sleep Minnie. The Australian National Senior's Championship Cup is going to take every last bit of both our strength. It may kill us to win. But it'll be worth it.

Minnie takes out a bag and brings out of it two shiny pink jackets. On the back of the jackets is written in neon letters: 'Bridge Burners'.

LIRAZ. Wow...

MINNIE. Just a little something I whipped on my sewing machine.

LIRAZ. Every great team has a uniform.

MINNIE. I have to admit Liraz, I'm excited about this. I never dreamed of being a champion myself. You've shown me that I have more life to live.

LIRAZ. I agree. I expected to have a worthy Bridge Partner. But I never expected to actually have a friend.

LIRAZ. Goodnight Partner.

They shake hands.

MINNIE. Goodnight partner.

Scene Six.

Minnie is in her apartment, putting on her scarf. Morris is watching her.

MORRIS. Well come what may, the big day is here.

MINNIE. Are you coming to watch?

MORRIS. I'd rather widdle my eyeball out with a spoon than spend the day with Liraz.

MINNIE. You're funny. But honestly, I'd like you to come cheer for us.

Rachel comes in.

RACHEL. Happy Birthday!

MINNIE. Good morning. I thought we were meeting downstairs all together.

RACHEL. I wanted to come in and give you your birthday present first.

MINNIE. Birthday present?

RACHEL. You didn't think I'd forget did you?

Rachel hands Minnie a small, wrapped box.

MINNIE. Rachel. This is really very considerate of you.

RACHEL. It's from Dad too.

MINNIE. You don't have to lie.

Rachel smiles. Minnie opens the box. It's an iPhone.

RACHEL. I thought that I could teach you how to use one. Well probably not. But I thought we might have fun trying.

MINNIE. I can take pictures with this?

RACHEL. That's the idea. And you can look up Bridge tactics. You can even get phone calls on it.

MINNIE. Rachel, I love it. I'm so happy.

RACHEL. Really?

MINNIE. Of course. Why wouldn't I be? It's my 90th birthday and I finally have everything I've ever wanted. I'm playing Bridge- at a very high level with a partner who is good. Very good. We're about to win the Australian National Senior's

Championship Cup – something I never dared dream of! And my granddaughter is dating a nice man and it works! It works! You're going to get married and have children and our line is going to continue. All my birthday wishes are coming true!

RACHEL. Baba, there's something I have to tell you.
I should have told you the truth a long time ago.

MINNIE. What are you talking about?

MORRIS. Not on her birthday.

Minnie looks at Morris. What does he know?

MINNIE. What is it?

RACHEL. Baba! I can't have children. I had early menopause.

MINNE. What?

RACHEL. When I was 25. It was just one of those things. Extremely bad luck statistically.

MINNIE. Why didn't you say something?

RACHEL. I was a mess. I was 25, having hot flushes. I didn't want to talk about it to anyone. And then time went by and it seemed weird to bring it up. You kept talking about me having children. It was too much.

MINNIE. You really can't have children?

RACHEL. I really can't have children.

Morris hangs his head.

Minnie looks at Morris.

MINNIE. You knew?

Morris looks away. He nods.

MINNIE. You knew and didn't tell me?

MINNIE. Rachel, you told your grandfather, but not me?

She looks at Rachel. Rachel shakes her head.

RACHEL. No.

MINNIE. Then how?

She looks at him. He looks down.

MORRIS. Gabriel told me.

MINNIE. Gabriel talks to... you?

MORRIS. Yes

MINNIE. My own son hates me.

MINNIE. Is it because I didn't take him to see the whales that time?

MORRIS. I don't think he even remembers those whales.

MINNIE. You never took him to see any whales. How is it that I'm the villain? Why doesn't feminism help me? If it's for all women, why isn't it for me? He didn't take him to see the whales. Everything ruined... Just because I...played Bridge...

RACHEL. Baba. I'm sorry. I picked the wrong day to set up boundaries. This last month has been really fun. Now let's go and win the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup.

Minnie gathers herself.

MINNIE. Yes. Of course. It's time to go. The game.

MORRIS. Happy Birthday. Minnie, I adore you-

Minnie accepts his kiss on the cheek, but doesn't react.

She walks out of the room.

Scene Seven.

Liraz is waiting on her motorized scooter. Minnie comes down with Rachel. Minnie is trying to talk fast to get away from Rachel, but of course she cannot outpace Rachel.

LIRAZ. You're late.

MINNIE. I'm always late. Don't you know Liraz?

LIRAZ. You couldn't sleep either huh? Maybe that's good. Because our bodies will compensate by giving us more adrenaline.

MINNIE. I've got plenty of adrenaline.

Ichabod arrives.

ICHABOD. Hello *Bobeshi*. Good morning Mrs. Cohen. Hello Rachel my dear.

RACHEL. Ichabod, you can call her Minnie.

MINNIE. Mrs. Cohen will do.

RACHEL. We booked a trip last night to go hiking in Wilson's Prom

ICHABOD. We're leaving next Saturday and we return the following Sunday.

Liraz looks up, as though she's been jabbed by a knife.

LIRAZ. Saturday... But Saturday is our night Ichabod.

ICHABOD. Oh yes, well I was thinking perhaps we could meet every second Monday instead?

LIRAZ. Every second Monday? That's not very often.

ICHABOD. Well, I have a girlfriend now. You understand *Bobeshi*. Life calls me.

Minnie and Liraz both look shaky.

Norma finishes setting up.

NORMA. Alright champs, you ready?

LIRAZ. I am more ready than I've ever been in my life.

RACHEL. Good luck Baba! Sorry I upset you. Just go out there and win!

MINNIE. Oh I will.

Minnie and Liraz both nod. They go to take their place.

Ichabod and Rachel watch the game, canoodling, but as it continues, they are more and more on the edge of their seats.

Rachel and Ichabod are watching the Bridge game.

RACHEL. I can't believe they're leading. This really is very exciting. Your grandmother's a very expressive dummy! Wow- look at Baba play both those hands! She's amazing! I really think they could win!

ICHABOD. It looks like it!

RACHEL. I have to tell you something. Something that may change things... About me. I like you so much. But there are things... I can't...

ICHABOD. Me first Rachel. I have to tell you something too. And I hope you will still consider me for your boyfriend.

RACHEL. What is it?

ICHABOD. I don't ever see myself as wanting children.

RACHEL. Really?

ICHABOD. I'm sorry. I should have said earlier. But I... I didn't want to presume. But now, it feels as though we're in something deep and very true. And if I don't tell you now, then it's cruel. I understand if you don't want to continue. But I will miss you greatly.

RACHEL. No. This is perfect. Perfect. *(She looks to the game.)* They're on the last hand! They're really going to do it aren't they? It's funny, suddenly in life everything seems possible. I thought for so long that I was going to be alone. I liked my own company for the most part. And I was ready to be used to it for the rest of my life. But now-

ICHABOD. The universe is expanding.

RACHEL. Yes. Exactly. It is expanding. I no longer know what the future will be. For so long, I've just pretty much been able to guess. I've bid low to avoid the same inevitable disappointment again and again. But from now on, I'm bidding high. If they can win the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup then anything's possible. You and I can have it all. I'm so proud of them. And I'm so proud of us- for saying yes- for taking a chance in our mid to late thirties- for accepting the adventure of each other instead of opting for the safe bid of our lifetimes alone. They're going to win- wait- What's happened? What's happened? What's happened?

ACT THREE.

Scene One.

Dinnertime in the Dining Room. A 'Happy Birthday Minnie' banner is up. Norma is taking down a 'Champions!' banner. Minnie, Morris and Rachel sit at one table. Liraz and Ichabod sit at another. Norma comes along with menus. She goes to Liraz's table first. They're all wearing birthday hats, but looking stricken.

NORMA. You won't be joining the Cohen's?

LIRAZ. No. We will most certainly not be joining the Cohen's.

NORMA. The special for you Mrs. Weinberg?

LIRAZ. Just a spinach salad for my grandson please.

ICHABOD. You have to eat something *Bobeshi*.

LIRAZ. No. My appetite has died. Forever.

Norma approaches Morris and Minnie's table.

NORMA. Interested in hearing the special?

MORRIS. No. We'll take the usual.

RACHEL. I'll hear the special.

NORMA. It's a glass noodle salad.

RACHEL. Fine I'll take it.

Norma goes to put their orders in.

RACHEL. You want to talk about what happened out there Baba? Come on, you have to do the post mortem.

MINNIE. I don't think there's much to say. I choked.

RACHEL. But Baba, you were doing so well. And you had the Ace of hearts. Why didn't you just play your Heart?

Minnie. I couldn't bear to because my heart is broken. Everything I've loved I've ruined.

Back to Ichabod and Liraz.

LIRAZ. I suppose you'll be cancelling your plans with that woman now and we'll go back to our Saturday night dinners.

ICHABOD. She's still my girlfriend Bobeshi.

LIRAZ. Girlfriend? Don't you see? She's a desperate loner. The only reason I introduced you was so that her grandmother would agree to be my Bridge partner. We set you up. But the joke's on me, because she chocked and blew the game.

ICHABOD. No Bobeshi. The joke is on me it seems. Good day to you.

Ichabod stands up.

LIRAZ. Now Ichabod, calm down.

ICHABOD. It was always you and me. You were my best friend. A friendship built on honesty. And you've broken that. Shame on you Bobeshi! And Rachel- I'm sorry- but I can't continue a relationship built on a lie!

RACHEL. Ichabod- I love you-

ICHABOD. Love. Ha. Love is just sentimentalized neural activity.

He leaves. Rachel goes to run after him.

MINNIE. Rachel, forget him. You don't need him.

RACHEL. No. I do need him. It's you that doesn't anymore.

She goes to run after him, crying.

MORRIS. At least now we're rid of being in laws with Liraz.

MINNIE. I'm very angry at you.

MORRIS. You'll forgive me in time.

MINNIE. Depends how much time we have left. I might just be able to wait it out.

MORRIS. Let's not let one little fight at the end ruin everything.

MINNIE. But you were lying to me. About speaking to Gabriel. About Rachel. About everything. Obviously, this was not one little fight at the end. This was our whole partnership.

MORRIS. Everyone lies to each other. It's just a shame you found out when you did. You should come back to Memoir Class. Think about all the other things we could find out about and share with each other.

MINNIE. You're doing Memoir?

MORRIS. I've been alone all month.

MINNIE. You like being alone.

MORRIS. No. I like being with you. And only you.

MINNIE. Well, now you've got me.

Scene Two.

Rachel catches up to Ichabod. Norma is clearing up in the background.

RACHEL. Ichabod!

ICHABOD. No!

RACHEL. Please! I never get along with anyone like I do with you. I'm like some weird reptile. I don't connect with people. And you're the same. But we connected with each other. Can't this just be the alternate universe? A better universe. The one where our grandmothers aren't crazy and we're not so set in our ways that we throw away something amazing. Can't this universe be the one you were trying to reach. I'll pretend if you will. And then after a while it'll just be real. We won't have to pretend at all.

ICHABOD. I'm sorry if you're sad. Good luck Rachel.

Rachel raises her voice at him.

RACHEL. I don't accept that. I don't accept that you won't have me in your life.

Ichabod snaps at Rachel:

ICHABOD. Well Rachel, you're just going to have to.

Rachel fights back crying and hurries away.

Norma approaches Ichabod.

NORMA. You okay Doc?

ICHABOD. I'm fine.

NORMA. You know I've been working here a long time. I've seen a lot of lives go by. It's funny. I never thought I'd get so attached to the residents. I was so many things. I was the lead singer in a mod rock band. I was a librarian. Part time. I was an accountant. I was halfway through a law degree. But I ended up here. Hanging out with a bunch of old people. I've been hearing about people's regrets now for an awfully long time. That's the one thing people seem to hold onto. The love stories they messed up. The chances they gave away. The time they wasted. I can pick it. When I see someone young. I can see so clearly the things they'll regret later in life. Time moves quick doc. Not far off from the speed of light. And next thing you know, life has passed you by. Get the girl. Get the dream. At least for a season. Because it's Autumn before you know it.

Norma smiles at Ichabod and squeezes his shoulder. And then walks on.

Scene Three.

In the pool change rooms, Minnie is wearing a frilly bathing suit. She's putting on her swim cap. Liraz comes in very slowly on her scooter, wearing her bathing suit.

MINNIE. Hello Liraz.

LIRAZ. You have some nerve.

MINNIE. I always swim at this time. If you didn't want to say hello then why did you come at this time?

LIRAZ. Oh, I didn't come to say hello.

Minnie goes to walk towards the door. Liraz moves her scooter in between Minnie and the door.

LIRAZ. I worked so hard to become your partner. And you just, without thinking, without considering me, without any respect for the game you've been so blessed in, you just threw it all away.

MINNIE. It was one card game Liraz.

LIRAZ. It was the whole reason for my life. I know you think I'm worthless. But now I do too.

MINNIE. I'm sorry you feel that way.

LIRAZ. You said we were friends. You even made us jackets.

MINNIE. I said I'm sorry Liraz. I didn't mean to ruin things for you. Honestly, I'm just as sad as you are about it.

LIRAZ. You were the best. I studied you, I tested you. I believed in you. You robbed me of my dream. Of everything I was living for.

MINNIE. I'm sorry. What more can I say?

LIRAZ. You even robbed me of my Grandson. Ichabod and the Australian National Senior's Championship Cup were the only things that meant anything to me.

MINNIE. Aren't you getting a little dramatic? You used me. I used you. We won for a while and then we both lost. Now move on.

LIRAZ. Oh I will. Don't you worry about that. But you don't get to just walk away from this. Like it never happened. No. Not this time.

MINNIE. Where's Norma? Isn't she coming to help you?

LIRAZ. I don't need her help this time.

MINNIE. Well how will you get into the pool?

LIRAZ. I'm not going swimming.

MINNIE. Well I am.

LIRAZ. You don't deserve your talent. You don't appreciate it. I went to so much trouble for you Minnie. You don't know the trouble I went to, to be your partner. I thought Anastasia would be weak- but she wasn't. I pulled a muscle in my arm trying to keep the pillow over her face.

MINNIE. Liraz...

LIRAZ. And Candice, she was slippery in the water. She tried to pull me down with her. I risked my own life – twice- to be your partner.

MINNIE. This is not funny Liraz.

LIRAZ. I don't find anything funny anymore.

MINNIE. But you can't walk. You haven't walked in years. Norma has to help you into the pool. You couldn't kill two people.

Liraz gets out of her scooter. She takes a step towards Minnie.

LIRAZ. We all have our secrets.

MINNIE. I should have known.

LIRAZ. As if you care about anyone else's life. But your own....

MINNIE. Just you try it, you narcissistic bitch.

LIRAZ. A good player knows when to finesse.

MINNIE. And a great player knows when not to.

They attack.

Scene Four.

Life Celebration. Morris and Rachel sit together. Ichabod sits apart from them on his own. Norma speaks.

NORMA. Today is a very sad day. But we must remember that it is a Life Celebration. We are celebrating the lives of Liraz Weinberg and the now truly late Minnie Cohen. They were both great fun and forces of life to be reckoned with. I loved how Liraz always ordered the special because she loved surprises. And didn't she surprise us all in the end? And Minnie was a gentle soul who never murdered any of the other residents and is mourned by her widower, Morris, who has become a shining light in our Memoir Group. I don't want to brag, but it's very rare that I don't pick when a resident is going to die. But no one can predict murder. So I guess I've got my perfect record of predicting resident deaths back again. Now please join me for a minutes silence while we reflect on those departed.

Minnie and Morris speak as she does so.

RACHEL. How are you Pop-op Morris?

MORRIS. I'm on the way out.

RACHEL. What will I do without you?

MORRIS. You have a lot to be very proud of. You're the principal of a whole high school.

RACHEL. Oh- wait- I thought you knew it was a primary school.

MORRIS. I thought those kids looked small.

RACHEL. It's all the same anyway. People are born, they grow, they die.

MORRIS. Your grandmother never should have gotten involved with that woman.

RACHEL. It's a pretty exciting way to go.

MORRIS. It's horrible. But at least it was quick. That's the most you can ask for at this age, a quick, painless death.

RACHEL. I don't know if it was painless.

MORRIS. I just hope I go that quickly.

Rachel and Morris keep talking.

RACHEL. I heard Ichabod is starting a lawsuit.

MORRIS. But it was his grandmother that killed everyone.

RACHEL. His argument is about poorly prescribed medication I think.

MORRIS. Thank goodness I lobbied for that security camera by the pool. Imagine if we had no answers. I hope you and Ichabod will be friends again. Now that Liraz is gone.

RACHEL. I don't know. He's pretty weird.

MORRIS. But everyone is. You know your grandmother when I first met her, she forgot my name straight away. Friends introduced us, but she was rushing from tennis to a game of Bridge. Before long, she became my whole world. I wasn't hers. But I liked it that way. It was a fair deal. I got to be with her. And she got to hold all the cards. You should talk to him.

RACHEL. Our grandmothers murdered each other. How could it ever work?

NORMA. Thank you for your silence. We must continue and find hope where there is sadness. And celebrate the lives of two extraordinary Bridge players, Minnie and Liraz. Would anyone like to speak?

Ichabod raises his hand. He walks up and stands in front of the microphone.

He takes out his flute.

RACHEL. Oh God he's going to play her a song on his flute.

ICHABOD. I dedicate this song to Rachel. It's called *Students of the Universe*.

He plays the flute. It is beautiful.

Rachel watches him. When he finishes she stands up and claps. They look at each other. Him holding his flute, her with her hands together.

The End.

