

Losing It
by Bruce Miller

Running Time
Approx. 95 minutes

Final Version1

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Synopsis

The play takes place toward the end of the first year of the Covid pandemic. Michael, Sue, and Stephen are boomer siblings meeting on Zoom as they do fairly regularly. But, Sue and Stephen have a specific agenda for this particular meeting. During the early stages of the conversation, Michael and Sue catch up with each other while waiting for the always-late Stephen to show up. The conversation is witty and focused on pop-culture and current events from a Baby Boomer perspective. The play turns darker when, first Sue, and later, Stephen, try to bring up Michael's health situation and force him to make some kind of plan for the future. Michael gets into it with Stephen over past grudges, but the real issue is Michael's unwillingness to address the fact that he is in the early stages of Alzheimer's. This leads to an ugly sibling battle, and ultimately, a beautiful, but sad denouement that speaks to living a life with courage and conviction.

Characters

Michael, the oldest brother, is witty, acerbic and judgmental. Though he has had a successful career as a college professor, he feels unfulfilled and angry about the choices he has made in his life.

Sue, a high school administrator, is the middle child, the one who works hard to keep the peace. She too is witty, but unlike Michael, she is anything but narcissistic.

Stephen, though a brilliant mathematician, has spent his life taking the easy, but seldom satisfying road through it. He has spent most of his working life, unhappily in a secure but unfulfilling middle school teaching job.

Production History

Recently written, so no productions as yet. Scenes from the play were workshopped at the Salon Studio in Nashville, TN.

Playwright Bio

Bruce Miller (Professor of Acting, Emeritus) was the Director of Acting Programs and Senior Acting Teacher at the University of Miami's Acting and Musical Theatre Conservatory for most of his 25-year career there. He taught acting and script analysis to both BFA and BA students. He was the recipient of the University of Miami's Excellence in Teaching Award and The Educational Theatre Association's Founder's Award for Lifetime Achievement. His books include *The Actor as Storyteller*, *The Scene Study Book*, *Acting Solo*, *Actor's Alchemy*, *Head-first Acting*, and *Acting on the Script*. His more than 100 articles on acting appeared regularly in *Dramatics Magazine* and *Teaching Theatre*. Since retirement, he has been writing plays and poetry. He is also working on a novel. He is a member of AEA and SAG-AFTRA, and holds an MFA in Acting from Temple University.

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Michael **72, a retired professor**
Sue **69, his sister, a private school administrator**
Stephen **67, their brother, a retired school teacher**

SCENE 1

Michael is on the zoom screen as the play opens; he waits a few seconds and then Sue appears.

MICHAEL

There you are! How are you, Sis? You look great!

SUE

Yeah right. I've put on seven pounds in three months and until two weeks ago haven't been outside longer than the time it takes to get in the car.

MICHAEL

You feeling okay?

SUE

I'm all right. Getting by, like everybody else. The question is how are *you* doing?

MICHAEL

I'm fine. Really.

SUE

You sure?

MICHAEL

Yeah, don't worry about me.

SUE

Well, I do. We all do.

MICHAEL

Well, there's no need.

SUE

Yeah, right.

MICHAEL

Look, under the circumstances, I'm doing fine. I taught a theory class last night.

SUE

You didn't.

MICHAEL

I did.

SUE

Well how did you manage that?

MICHAEL

It was on Zoom. Like everything else. You know, seminar once removed.

SUE

How did it go?

MICHAEL

Fine. The students pretend they're not locked in their bedrooms, and for some reason they actually seem to listen better than they do when they're doing it live.

SUE

Yeah?

MICHAEL

I think it's cause they're not trying to impress everyone around them, and they're less self-conscious.

SUE

Huh! I've been an administrator so long, I forget what it's like on the battlefield.

MICHAEL

Well, it felt good trying to get out there again.

SUE

I bet. Maybe I should try it.

MICHAEL

You should. I wasn't nervous at all once I started talking. The fact that everybody's just on a screen -- keeps it sorta anonymous and unthreatening. Anyway, it was nice to be able to do it again. Or should I say get away with it one more time.

SUE

So, it went okay then?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I guess it did. I was surprisingly brilliant.

SUE

He said modestly.

MICHAEL

All right. All right. Surprisingly adequate. Is that better?

SUE

Much.

MICHAEL

I actually had the vocabulary; remembered most of the basic isms. You know like realism, naturalism, all that shit.

SUE

And did you remember what some of them meant?

MICHAEL

Some of them, smart ass. When I wasn't sure, I asked them for the definitions.

SUE

Clever.

MICHAEL

Basic survival skills, Sis. I can still do that.

SUE

So, you managed to fool 'em?

MICHAEL

I guess. I did a lot better than I do when I'm talking to my friends and family, that's for sure. Especially when I'm talking to people my age where the mere suggestion of forgetting a name almost insures the forgetting of that name ... and several others connected to the topic.

SUE

I sorta know what you mean.

MICHAEL

Just wait a few years, I'm telling you. Yesterday, I was talking to my friend Teddy, you know from graduate school.

SUE

I used to date him, remember? We used to go to the movies all the time.

MICHAEL

That's right. I forgot. So, he wanted to know if the guy with that baritone Western voice and big moustache had died.

SUE

Wilford Brimley? The Quaker Oats guy?

MICHAEL

That's good. Yeah, he could have meant Wilford Brimley, I guess. But, I knew he was talking about that other guy, you know, the guy that does the voice-overs -- for the truck company.

SUE

The Irish guy? The comedian who's also a pretty good actor.

MICHAEL

Don't get me off task, Sis. I'll never get back. I know who you mean, but later. You know, the guy that played Virgil Earp in *Tombstone*. The guy from *The Mask*.

SUE

The Jim Carrey movie?

MICHAEL

No! The other one. With Madonna.

SUE

You mean Cher? *Mask*. The movie was *Mask*. Not *The Mask*.

MICHAEL

Right. *Mask!* The guy in that movie; the one on the motorcycle, with the moustache -- whatisname -- he was in that real good movie with that stage actress who does the commercial for loose bowels or soft bones, or something like that; you know, she was in that production of *The Seagull* in the 70's; the one directed by Andrei Serban; the one with the guy who, you know, played Nixon in *Nixon and Frost*; he was that matinee idol in that *Dracula* production on Broadway; in the early 80's.

SUE

Christopher Lee?

MICHAEL

No, that was the movies. Come on! He was the shithead husband in *Diary of a Mad Housewife*. He got pissed off cause he thought it should have made him a big movie star but it didn't happen. You know, he was in the last few seasons of *The Americans!* Forget

it. Anyway, he wrote that book a coupla years ago dishing on all the bigger stars he had worked with or lived near.

SUE

I have no idea.

MICHAEL

Oh, come on, you know, Frank something.

SUE

Sinatra?

MICHAEL

Oh, please! Were you even listening?

SUE

Gorshin? The original Riddler?

MICHAEL

Wow. That's a good one. Pulled that one outta your ass. But, No! Frank ... Langella!

SUE

Oh, right! You shoulda said he was married to Whoopie Goldberg.

MICHAEL

You're right! My fuckin' brain! Well, he works all the time now, I guess; cause now that he's old, he's more interested in the paycheck than the fame. Anyway, he was in that really good production they showed on PBS from the 70's with whatsername – the blond, very pretty, big on stage but not in the movies ... Blythe Danner! It just came to me. It has been on the tip of my tongue for the last five minutes.

SUE

Wasn't she the mother of Gwyneth Paltrow?

MICHAEL

Yeah! Still is, I guess. Now why didn't I think of that? I bet Gwyn has the career she always wanted or shoulda had -- or maybe she doesn't think that way, I don't know. Anyway, she was in that indie movie a couple o' years ago that was a hit with all the seniors who go to those art house theatres with memberships.

SUE

Am I supposed to remember that?

MICHAEL

Everybody old went to see it.

SUE

Maybe I don't qualify yet.

MICHAEL

Dream on.

SUE

Very sweet, Michael. As always.

MICHAEL

Sorry. What was I saying? Oh, yeah, so she falls in love with this rich Texas oil guy who's old now, but still handsome and rich, whose name I still can't think of, that isn't Wilford Brimley, but anyway, he dies at the end. You know! Sam Something.

SUE

You mean Sam Elliot?

MICHAEL

Yes! Thank you. Yeah, Sam Elliot. Wait, is that right? It seems right, but it doesn't sound right. Is that it?

SUE

The one in *Mask*? He's still around. He was the brother in *A Star is Born*, remember?

MICHAEL

Remember! Ha! That's a good one. You mean the new one?

SUE

Of course I mean the new one. With Lady Gaga.

MICHAEL

Sam Elliot, that's right. Sam Neill kept popping in my head, but I knew that was wrong. And ironically, the other day I was thinking about *Jurassic Park* for some reason -- you know, the first one -- and I couldn't remember the cast. I mean, I remembered Richard Attenborough, of course, but not some of the others. I mean I didn't even remember Laura Dern was in it until I saw her talking about it on some show she was on -- pushing the show she won for -- what was it -- you know, on HBO, with Reese Whatsername, *Witherspoon*, and Nicole Kidman -- she does such a good American accent ...

SUE

They all do now. Especially the Australians. Sometimes I'm shocked when I hear them on talk shows. I had no idea they weren't American.

MICHAEL

Yeah, but the Brits too, nowadays. They all do American. Remember how bad Lawrence Olivier was at the end, trying to make a lot of money for his kids and doing all those roles in bad movies and he had to be American?

SUE

No. Like what? I don't remember that.

MICHAEL

You're asking me? No wait. *The Betsy!* He sucked in that.

SUE

Do I remember that one?

MICHAEL

How the hell do I know? Some movie based on Henry Ford. It was a big budget stinker. Some dreck that Harold Robbins wrote.

SUE

Harold Robbins. I loved *The Carpetbaggers*.

MICHAEL

You mean you loved all the sex in it.

SUE

Wasn't that the reason you read Harold Robbins?

MICHAEL

Not me. I read him for the character descriptions and important themes.

SUE

Ha! So how do you know he was doing it for his kids?

MICHAEL

Who?

SUE

Lawrence Oliver.

MICHAEL

Doing what for his kids?

SUE

Making crap movies for the money.

MICHAEL

Oh! Yeah, right! Why else would he embarrass himself?

SUE

He was in that movie with the kids. He played a Frenchman. When Diane Lane was a little girl. That one was adorable.

MICHAEL

Something with “romance” in the title.

SUE

A Little Romance?

MICHAEL

Maybe. Some kind of romance.

SUE

He was good in that.

MICHAEL

His French accent probably sucked as bad as his American. We just didn’t realize it. Cause we think French people actually talk like Pepi Lepew.

SUE

That’s funny. Probably not a funny as his accent, though, or as stinky.

MICHAEL

Heh-heh-heh.

SUE

Thank you, M. Chevalier.

MICHAEL

Did you like him?

SUE

Not really, but I guess he was charming in *Gigi*.

MICHAEL

I guess so. Anyway, how did we get on that?

SUE

We were talking about Sam Elliot.

MICHAEL

No, after that.

SUE

Weren't you saying something about Sam Neill?

MICHAEL

Oh! That's right. I was saying something about *Jurassic Park*.

SUE

You were gonna say something about Laura Dern.

MICHAEL

You are good! Right. So Laura Dern was really good in that show with Nicole Kidman and Reese What'sername, *Big, Little Lies*, and she won an Emmy or something, and that same year ...

SUE

You're talking like it's ancient history. Wasn't that just last year?

MICHAEL

How the hell do I know? My whole life's become one big blur.

SUE

Well, it was.

MICHAEL

Okay great. The point is -- in that *same year* she was nominated for that movie about, you know, the couple that gets divorced but still likes each other.

SUE

The one with Scarlett Johansson?

MICHAEL

Right. And that weirdo actor, really good, who's the new Darth Vader.

SUE

Adam Driver.

MICHAEL

Right.

SUE

A Marriage Story.

MICHAEL

Yeah. But, I don't think she shoulda gotten nominated for that -- cause it was like she was playing the same character she did on the TV show. Some bitchy rich lawyer. I mean

it was the same performance for god sakes. It was like a carbon copy. Hey, do you think anyone under 50 knows what a carbon copy is?

SUE

I doubt it.

MICHAEL

You know, the other day I was thinking of all the things that have come and gone, and no one noticed.

SUE

I know what you mean. But like what?

MICHAEL

So many things. Like – okay – just sticking with stationery supplies.

SUE

Okay.

MICHAEL

Onion skin paper.

SUE

Yeah.

MICHAEL

The smell of the fluid in a mimeograph machine.

SUE

Best smell in the world. What's a mimeograph machine?

MICHAEL

Right.

SUE

Cartridge pens.

MICHAEL

I loved them, especially after they were broken in.

SUE

Yeah. Correction tape. And correction fluid.

MICHAEL

Another great smell.

SUE

You got that right.

MICHAEL

So many things. Sometimes I think that's gonna be me.

SUE

What are you talking about?

MICHAEL

Things that come and go, and no one even noticed.

SUE

Stop that. When you go, people will notice.

MICHAEL

I'm not so sure. Anyway. What was I saying?

SUE

Laura Dern.

MICHAEL

No, the original point.

SUE

Was there one?

MICHAEL

I'm not sure. But, anyway, I remembered Richard Attenborough – a great actor, by the way, but he ended up directing movies later in his career. I think, no, I know, he directed *Gandhi*. Won all kinds of awards that year. Anyway, Sam Neill was like the leading man in – shit – now I can't even remember the name of that fucking dinosaur movie –

SUE

Jurassic Park.

MICHAEL

Thank you. You know, I still picture Sam Neill looking like he did in that movie, so I'm shocked whenever I see him now, which isn't that often cause I think he likes to stay in Australia or New Zealand, wherever he's from, cause he's getting too old to drive that far to Hollywood.

SUE

I hope you still know that you can't drive to Hollywood from New Zealand.

MICHAEL

Why? Cause they haven't made a battery that will last that long?

SUE

And they say you're starting to lose it.

MICHAEL

Who says?

SUE

They say.

MICHAEL

Well, tell them to be careful. That joke is too close to home.

SUE

They are sorry.

MICHAEL

Okay. Cause I *was* joking, in case there is any doubt.

SUE

I know.

MICHAEL

I also remember Jeff Goldberg was in *Jurassic Park*. Chaos Theory. Wow. First time I heard about that!

SUE

Goldblum.

MICHAEL

Isn't that what I said?

SUE

You said Goldberg.

MICHAEL

I did? Well, I was thinking Goldblum.

SUE

Anyway?

MICHAEL

Right. So I used to think he was a great actor – you know, like in *The Fly*?

SUE

Yeah, that was great. I liked the one with Vincent Price too.

MICHAEL

Me two. That was a great fly head. Scared the shit out of me.

SUE

Yeah. I think I saw that with you.

MICHAEL

I think you did and you were too young.

SUE

Yeah. I didn't sleep for weeks after that.

MICHAEL

Me neither. Anyway, I thought Jeff Goldblum was great in that. But now, after all these years, I don't think so any more. I mean he's good as himself, you know, like John Wayne was good. I mean playing John Wayne, but that's what you're gonna get. John Wayne. Same with Jeff Goldberg.

SUE

Goldblum.

MICHAEL

I know. I did that on purpose. Just to see if you were listening.

SUE

Right!

MICHAEL

I mean if he gets cast, you're gonna get that chaos theory fly guy no matter what the role was as written. I mean that's what you're paying for, and I guess that's why he doesn't work all that much any more. We're all sick of the chaos.

SUE

Speak for yourself.

MICHAEL

Always do. Always will. Jeff Gold – blum is like cocaine.

SUE

How so?

MICHAEL

Good in small doses.

SUE

Huh! Well that was a hard lesson learned.

MICHAEL

Harder for some than others.

SUE

Okay, Michael, you made your point.

MICHAEL

Was there one?

SUE

Moving on, Michael. Okay?

MICHAEL

Gotcha.

SUE

There are so many shows now between cable and streaming, you don't know what he's been doing. He could be working all the time.

MICHAEL

Who?

SUE

Jeff Goldblum.

MICHAEL

Jesus Christ! Thank you. You know I saw this documentary a while back where Jeff Goldblum went back to his hometown – I think it was Pittsburgh – to play Harold Hill in whatchamacallit – *The Music Man* – to open the city's new art center. He probably donated a shitload of money besides to get his name on the building.

SUE

Maybe he donated it because he appreciated what the city meant to him growing up. Or maybe, he just likes to give back, you know?

MICHAEL

Okay. I stand corrected, whatever.

SUE

I hate that expression.

MICHAEL

Me too. But it can be useful. Anyway. The documentary follows him around and through rehearsals for the production, and he was doing Harold Hill like *The Fly* ...

SUE

Really?

MICHAEL

Well, no, not exactly. I mean he was doing it all Jeff Goldblum-my, you know.

SUE

Okay.

MICHAEL

And he really sucked. I mean bigtime. But, somehow, in the end he pulled it off. But the transition from sucking to not even embarrassing was sort left out of the documentary.

SUE

That wasn't a documentary.

MICHAEL

What do you mean, it wasn't a documentary.

SUE

It wasn't a documentary.

MICHAEL

What are you talking about?

SUE

It was a mockumentary.

MICHAEL

You mean like *Waiting for Guffman*?

SUE

That's right.

MICHAEL

No.

SUE

It was. It did really well at film festivals.

MICHAEL

You mean all of that was a joke?

SUE

Yeah. And on you, huh?

MICHAEL

I can't believe it.

SUE

Uh-huh. Now, what do you think of Jeff Goldblum?

MICHAEL

I'll have to watch it again. Come to think of it, I might have watched it from the middle. That's probably why it fooled me, you know?

SUE

Uh-huh.

MICHAEL

Or, I'm losing it even faster than I think I'm losing it.

SUE

You saw it a couple of years ago. Before you were losing it.

MICHAEL

Maybe. Or maybe I was losing it back then and didn't know it yet. I just thought it was chaos theory or something.

SUE

You were getting your molecules mixed up with a fly, maybe?

MICHAEL

Thanks. That's it. So. Did you ever notice how it's more obvious when movie stars hook up, you can watch how their marriages fall apart from a distance and then it destroys their careers at the same time?

SUE

What?

MICHAEL

Yeah! Cause we take sides even though we don't really know anything about it.

SUE

I swear I don't know what you're talking about half the time.

MICHAEL

It's the disease.

SUE

No. I never did.

MICHAEL

No, really. I mean when people we know are going through bad times, we know them and people are complicated and relationships are complicated, so it's hard to figure out what's going wrong, but with famous people, we only know a little, so it's easier to figure out what's going on. And since we don't really give a shit about them, it's a fun thing to do.

SUE

You mean you play analyst based on the bullshit you read, or see on television? You gotta be pulling my leg. I mean really.

MICHAEL

I'm not. I think everybody does it. Where does that expression come from anyway?

SUE

What expression?

MICHAEL

Pulling my leg.

SUE

I happen to know the answer to that. I looked it up once.

MICHAEL

Good for you.

A silence.

MICHAEL

So? Are you going to tell me?

SUE

It's a British expression traced back to the 1800's. Before even you were born.

MICHAEL

Ha! Yeah.

SUE

So, apparently, robbers and thieves, during Victorian times, would grab your leg from behind on the street. You'd fall down and make it easier for them to rob you.

MICHAEL

Makes sense. Somebody should write a book about derivations of phrases.

SUE

There are plenty of them.

MICHAEL

Really?

SUE

Yeah.

MICHAEL

How do you know?

SUE

Because I read non-fiction, okay? You spend all your time reading novels and plays, but I read to learn stuff.

MICHAEL

What? You don't think I read to learn stuff.

SUE

No, of course you do. But, fiction is indirect. Oh, you're just pulling my leg. You know exactly what I'm talking about.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I do. But fiction and plays, if they're good, tell a higher truth. More than just facts.

SUE

Well, these days, even facts seem to be difficult for 40% of the population.

MICHAEL

You got that right. Anyway, I like facts too. I watch a lot of documentaries.

SUE.

Trying to keep up with Ryan, right?

MICHAEL

No, I always have. You know that. I always had an interest.

SUE

Like the one about Jeff Goldblum?

MICHAEL

Ok, okay.

SUE

Still just pulling your leg.

MICHAEL

It's fucking out of my hip socket now! Enough!

SUE

What was that one you used to watch with Mom?

MICHAEL

I watched something with Mom?

SUE

About Hollywood. You were obsessed with it. Came on after the Monday Night movie. You were obsessed with movies.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I was; still am I guess. What was that called?

SUE

I have no idea. You were the one that watched it.

MICHAEL

You're right. Me and Ma, huh. That did not happen too often, did it?

SUE

I'll say. You and Mom together was an event.

MICHAEL

For sure. Anyway, it was black and white. And it was produced by Jack Haley, Jr. He was the big documentary guy back then on TV.

SUE

A. How would you know that, and B. so what?

MICHAEL

This is so stupid, but this is how my memory works. I remember Jack Haley, Jr. because he did all these documentaries, mostly about the movie business, I think, and, because he was the son of Jack Haley, Sr. And I figured that's how he got into it.

SUE

Makes sense. Junior, Senior. That's the way that stuff goes.

MICHAEL

I know. But he was the son of Jack Haley. I mean that's big, right?

SUE

Who's Jack Haley?

MICHAEL

Who's Jack Haley?

SUE

That was the question.

MICHAEL

Come on! Jack Haley was the Tin Man in the *Wizard of Oz*.

SUE

Oh, yeah. I knew it sounded familiar.

MICHAEL

Well, I remember that Jack Haley, Jr. was the producer because I remember thinking he's so much better than his father. And I would hate to be Jack Haley Sr. knowing that my son had surpassed me.

SUE

Wait a second.

MICHAEL

What?

SUE

There's a lot to -- how do they say it now -- there's a lot to unpack there.

MICHAEL

Like what?

SUE

Well, in the first place, I would think Jack Haley Sr. would have been proud that his son surpassed him -- to use your words. I mean isn't that every parent's great hope?

MICHAEL

Yeah, of course. But I didn't mean it in that way.

SUE

Well, then how did you mean it?

MICHAEL

I meant it in the sense that his son's success was more legitimate than his dad's.

Sue

Not sure I know what that means either.

MICHAEL

Look all I'm saying is Jack Haley was the worst of Dorothy's traveling buddies.

SUE

How so?

MICHAEL

I don't mean worst like in the worst person. I mean as an actor, or character or whatever. Jack Haley was everybody's least favorite.

SUE

What? Did you take a poll or something?

MICHAEL

No. But wouldn't you say that's true? I mean he was the most boring. He was also the worst actor.

SUE

Well, I do have to agree with you on that one.

MICHAEL

Right. So, Jack Haley was hardly ever in anything else and he probably knew he was pretty second-rate, so it probably made him feel bad.

SUE

And therefore, he hated his son's success?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I'm just telling you why I remember that Jack Haley Jr. made that documentary.

SUE

Interesting insight as to how you mind works.

MICHAEL

Used to work.

SUE

It still works.

MICHAEL

If you say so.

SUE

I do. So, do you remember the name of it now?

MICHAEL

As a matter of fact, I do. It just popped into my head. It was called *Hollywood and the Stars*. So, there!

SUE

Yeah, I think that's right.

MICHAEL

What do you know? I thought you didn't watch it with us?

SUE

I must have seen it some time. How did we get on this topic anyway?

MICHAEL

We were talking about the fact that I liked documentaries.

SUE

Right. And Jeff Goldblum's mockumentary. Then there was something else you were saying. About famous people and their marriages, I think.

MICHAEL

Oh, yeah. Like Jeff Goldblum and whatserface, Geena Davis.

SUE

Right! They were a couple, weren't they?

MICHAEL

They were married.

SUE

Okay. She was so beautiful. Why would she want to marry him?

MICHAEL

I don't know. They're both tall. Maybe they fit together, you know? Anyway. They met on *The Fly* and fell in love.

SUE

What's that supposed to mean "they met on the fly"?

MICHAEL

No! They met on the set of the movie "The Fly".

SUE

Language! Oh, that's funny.

MICHAEL

So they met on the set and fell in love.

SUE

Who wouldn't?

MICHAEL

Okay, okay. And then they were this big power couple for a while. They thought they were hot shit and made that pirate movie.

SUE

What pirate movie?

MICHAEL

You know; that one directed by that big German director who does all those big budget movies.

SUE

I have no idea what you're talking about. How do you know all this crap, anyway?

MICHAEL

I don't know it though. I used to know it. Now I can't remember shit!

SUE

You still remember plenty.

MICHAEL

Cutthroat Island.

SUE

Is that a reality show?

MICHAEL

No, it's the name of the movie that Geena Davis and Jeff Goldblum were in. The pirate movie! It was a big flop and everybody lost a bundle, and then they got divorced.

SUE

How do you know *Cutthroat Island* was the cause of their divorce?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Cause after the movie flopped, they got divorced?

SUE

But how do you know that was the cause?

MICHAEL

I don't understand.

SUE

You talk like that was the only thing going on in their lives.

MICHAEL

Well, they're movie stars. That's what they do, right?

SUE

That's ridiculous. There are other parts of their lives you know nothing about.

MICHAEL

Like what?

SUE

You can't be serious.

MICHAEL

No, tell me.

SUE

Stuff! Like everybody else. Maybe she wanted a kid and he didn't. Maybe he wanted to move back to Pittsburgh and she didn't. Maybe they argued about religion who knows?

MICHAEL

Why would they argue about religion? They're both Jewish.

SUE

How do you know?

MICHAEL

Goldblum? Davis?

SUE

Davis is not necessarily a Jewish name.

MICHAEL

I know a lot of Davises. They're all Jewish.

SUE

That's because half the people you know are Jewish.

MICHAEL

That's not true. Davis is a Jewish name.

SUE

Jefferson Davis was not Jewish.

MICHAEL

How do you know? Maybe he was hiding it.

SUE

Bette Davis?

MICHAEL

She could be.

SUE

You're ridiculous.

MICHAEL

Ozzie Davis.

SUE

Definitely Jewish. So what's the point?

MICHAEL

With what?

SUE

Geena Davis and Jeff Goldblum.

MICHAEL

Oh, right! Jesus! My fucking head. So, after *Cutthroat Island*, she stopped making movies, I think. And he never had any more leads. See? Their marriage fucked up their careers. Cause everything's out in the public when you're a big star, and it's a curse that ruins everything.

SUE

That is such a bunch of crap. You draw all those conclusions on some tiny bits of bullshit you read on Page 6 of some rag paper or on *Inside Edition*, and then you do some pseudo-analysis based on that and then you say all this shit like it's factual.

MICHAEL

Roland Emmerich.

SUE

Who's that?

MICHAEL

The director who directed *Cutthroat Island*.

SUE

Didn't Geena Davis marry him?

MICHAEL

I think you're right. Yeah, she definitely did.

SUE

Wait a second.

MICHAEL

What are you doing?

SUE

I'm looking it up on IMDB.

MICHAEL

What's that?

SUE

What's what?

MICHAEL

What's that?

SUE

You don't know what IMDB is?

MICHAEL

I am a douche bag?

SUE

That's right; you are. First of all, Roland Emmerich did not direct *Cutthroat Island*.

MICHAEL

Then who did?

SUE

Renny Harlin.

MICHAEL

Oh, yeah. That's right. The Finnish guy. Emmerich's a Nazi.

SUE.

You mean he's German, Michael, German.

MICHAEL

Same thing.

SUE

Not quite. And Jeff Goldblum had nothing to do with that movie.

MICHAEL

What do you mean?

SUE

Cutthroat Island was with Matthew Modine.

MICHAEL

See?

SUE

See what?

MICHAEL

That makes my point. After that flop, Matthew Modine hardly ever worked.

SUE

How in God's name does that make your point? That has nothing to do with couples who get married and it ruins their careers.

MICHAEL

So how come he never worked after that?

SUE

How would I know? Maybe, he got something else going that he liked better.

MICHAEL

You mean like a family?

SUE

Maybe. Some people are able to do both, you know.

MICHAEL

So you keep telling me. Anyway, he couldn't. He gave up show business for his family.

SUE

According to you.

MICHAEL

And page 6.

SUE

Okay, Michael. You win.

MICHAEL

Thank you. Even with half a brain.

SUE

And Geena Davis's father was a church deacon.

MICHAEL

How do you know that?

SUE

Says it on IMDB. So, I guess she's not Jewish.

MICHAEL

Does that really mean I am a douche bag?

SUE

Ha! No. It stands for the Internet Movie Data Base. And, yes, you are a douche bag.

MICHAEL

I thought so.

SUE

What it stands for or you're a douche bag?

MICHAEL

Both. Hey! Where's Stephen? I thought he was gonna join us on this call?

SUE

He said he was. But he had a Zoom meeting before this. He said he might be late.

MICHAEL

He's always late.

SUE

Tell him that. He's joining up.

STEPHEN

Hey, you two! How are you guys?

SUE

Hangin' in, Stephen, how are you?

STEPHEN

Okay, I guess. How you doin', Michael?

MICHAEL

I'm fine, little brother. You're late, as usual.

SUE

As always.

STEPHEN

Yeah, well, I was the youngest. By the time I came along, Mom and Dad had given up on parenting.

MICHAEL

Yeah, they didn't even tell you you're supposed to close your mouth when you eat.

SUE

Or eat with utensils.

STEPHEN

So what? By the time I'm your age, everybody will be talking with their mouths full anyway. Just like Mom and Dad.

SUE

That's no lie. I couldn't stand to eat with them.

MICHAEL

My favorite was when they ate baked potatoes with sour cream.

SUE

Yum.

STEPHEN

Why do old people do that anyway?

MICHAEL

I can answer that now that I'm old.

STEPHEN

Okay, why?

MICHAEL
It saves time.

STEPHEN

Huh?

MICHAEL
Talking while eating saves time. And we're running out of that commodity. So, talking while eating is a practical solution. I know I've started doing it. Or maybe, it's just that I forget. I'm not sure.

SUE

Now, stop that.

STEPHEN

I like to do it when I have tuna in my mouth.

MICHAEL

It's best with chunk light.

STEPHEN

Don't make me throw up. How about pickled herring and sour cream?

MICHAEL

You eat that shit?

STEPHEN

Of course not. I was thinking of Mom and Dad.

SUE

All right, you two. I have to make a call to a parent. You two can carry on without me.

MICHAEL

Come back on when you're finished.

SUE

I will. Love you both.

MICHAEL

Yeah, yeah.

STEPHEN

I love you, too, Sue!

Sue exits.

STEPHEN

So. How are you, Michael?

MICHAEL

I'm fine, really.

STEPHEN

Are you telling me the truth?

MICHAEL

About what?

STEPHEN

Ha-ha. No, really.

MICHAEL

What do you want me to say?

STEPHEN

The truth.

MICHAEL

Since when do we tell each other the truth?

STEPHEN

Never. But this is important. So, tell me.

MICHAEL

I'm fine, really. Just getting a little bit more like Dad every day.

STEPHEN

Yeah, but he was worse than you at 40.

MICHAEL

That's true.

STEPHEN

He couldn't get through a sentence without saying whatchamacallit.

MICHAEL

[Type here]

[Type here]

Losing It/Miller 33

Doohickie.

STEPHEN
Doohickie what?

MICHAEL
No, he didn't say whatchamacallit; his go-to was doohickie ... and whatsitsname.

STEPHEN
You're right.

MICHAEL
I know I'm right.

STEPHEN
So, how often do you lose the words?

MICHAEL
I don't lose the words. I just lose the names.

STEPHEN
Of what?

MICHAEL
Of everything.

STEPHEN
No. Tell me. Like what?

MICHAEL
So, if I can't think of a name of someone, I'll try to describe them by doing a Kevin Bacon.

STEPHEN
You mean like six degrees of Kevin Bacon?

MICHAEL
Yeah, but then I won't be able to think of the names I'm associating, either.

STEPHEN
Man! That sucks. You used to know everyone and everything.

MICHAEL
Only in show biz.

STEPHEN
No, that's not true. You were good with books and authors too.

MICHAEL
And sports, and history, and the arts.

STEPHEN
But not science and math!

MICHAEL
You can say that again, but don't.

STEPHEN
That sucks.

MICHAEL
Yeah, now I'm like you.

STEPHEN
But, I never knew shit in the first place.

MICHAEL
So, who's worse off?

STEPHEN
I am.

MICHAEL
Why?

STEPHEN
Because at least you know you weren't always a moron.

MICHAEL
You're not a moron.

STEPHEN
Close enough. But at least I got the good looks.

MICHAEL
No, you didn't.

STEPHEN
Oh, right. You got that too.

MICHAEL
Yeah, but who got the athletic ability?

STEPHEN
Ah, that would be you, I believe.

MICHAEL
So let's summarize.

STEPHEN
Okay. You got the smarts, the good looks, and the athletic ability.

MICHAEL
Well, at least you're not gay.

STEPHEN
But, I am gay.

MICHAEL
Oh, that's right. I forgot.

STEPHEN
Did you really?

MICHAEL
Wouldn't that be nice?

STEPHEN
That is not politically correct.

MICHAEL
What isn't?

STEPHEN
Making fun of my being gay.

MICHAEL
How am I making fun?

STEPHEN
Suggesting it's like a bad thing.

MICHAEL
No. I just actually forgot.

STEPHEN
Did you really?

MICHAEL

Of course not. And I got the better sense of humor, too.

STEPHEN

In your opinion.

MICHAEL

Whose opinion counts more? The smart one or the slow one?

STEPHEN

Okay. Okay. You win.

MICHAEL

Let me enjoy it while I can.

STEPHEN

Hey, do you remember when I killed your Daisy Rifle?

MICHAEL

How could I forget?

STEPHEN

Well, maybe someday you will.

MICHAEL

Is that your brilliant sense of humor kicking in?

STEPHEN

No. I wasn't making a joke.

MICHAEL

All right. Please stop taking advantage of my rapid decline.

STEPHEN

So, talk to me.

MICHAEL

About what?

STEPHEN

About anything. About your rapid decline.

MICHAEL

Okay. Okay. You really wanna hear this shit?

STEPHEN

I said I did.

MICHAEL

Well, that's what people say until they start hearing it.

STEPHEN

Try me.

MICHAEL

Okay. You asked for it.

STEPHEN

Lay it on me.

MICHAEL

Every day I wake up scared.

STEPHEN

What of?

MICHAEL

Everything. That I'm not gonna remember what day it is. My name. How to take care of myself. How to turn the television on. Use the remote, which I can't fuckin' do now. What the words mean on a page. I mean I've seen the movies, heard the loved ones. Heard about the pain they're put through. The helplessness they feel. I don't want that. Not for me. Not for you. Not for Sis. And what am I gonna do? I don't want to watch my life slowly evaporate. My mind slowly contract, you know, like the proverbial frog in the boiling water. My brain reducing while I don't notice. Until I don't care. And then, the worst part, I'm already gone, except for my soulless body that has become your burden because I left long before. I don't want that. You don't want that. And Sue does not want that.

STEPHEN

You don't know that's how it's gonna be.

MICHAEL

That's right. No one does. And I have my flaws – too many to mention, I know – but gambling has never been one of them.

STEPHEN

I don't understand.

MICHAEL

I'm saying I don't want to gamble about when it's the right time.

STEPHEN

The right time to what?

MICHAEL

To pull the plug.

STEPHEN

What are you talking about? You're not pulling any plug. There's no need for that. You have family. We'll take care of you.

MICHAEL

I don't want that. And be honest here, you don't want that either.

STEPHEN

How do you know what we want?

MICHAEL

I don't. But it doesn't really matter cause it's not what I want, okay?

STEPHEN

No, it's not okay.

MICHAEL

Look, do you want to hear the truth or not?

STEPHEN

Sorry. Yes. Go on. Tell me the truth.

MICHAEL

The truth is I'm a son of a bitch. I've gone through three wives and my son won't speak to me.

STEPHEN

That is not all your fault.

MICHAEL

It doesn't matter. Some of it is my fault. A lot of it. Shit. Most of it. I have always been a selfish, arrogant shit. I have always thought I'm better than everyone else.

STEPHEN

All right. Shut up a minute. Some of what you're saying is true.

MICHAEL

Which parts?

STEPHEN

That your selfish, and arrogant, and think you're better than everyone else.

MICHAEL

That's all of it. Not some of it!

STEPHEN

I misspoke.

MICHAEL

I'm supposed to be the comedian here.

STEPHEN

But you are also one of the smartest, most talented people I have ever known.

MICHAEL

Thank you. That's all true. But I am not one of the nicest. Right? I'm asking you a question.

STEPHEN

No. You're not. You're not even close.

MICHAEL

That's right. I'm not. So, listen, Stephen. I am losing it. Are you listening?

STEPHEN

I'm listening, asshole.

MICHAEL

So, day by day, brain cell by brain cell, it's going. And what goes first? The talent. And the smarts, and what's left then, huh? What's left then? That I'm nice?

STEPHEN

You're nice enough! You're my brother for Christ sake. You don't have to be nice.

MICHAEL

And what does that mean? You know, saints, when they start getting really bad, even they get mean. Remember Dad. He was a saint. He put up with Mom for what? For 70 fucking years. I ran away as soon as I got outta high school. But not Dad. Saints stick it out to the bitter end. And what was he like, huh? In those last three years he told her every fucking thing he ever thought about her. It was like he had goddamn writers. And, I'm no saint. Am I? No! Say it. Am I?

STEPHEN

No! You're no saint!

MICHAEL

Thank you. Now what?

STEPHEN

You could still, I mean when it gets bad enough, come and live with Lane and me.

MICHAEL

I'm not living with Lane and you, okay?

STEPHEN

Why not? He already told me he'd be happy to have you.

MICHAEL

No one has ever been happy to have me. Not after the first two weeks. Ask any of my three wives. They'll tell you. Besides, I don't want to live with you.

STEPHEN

Why not?

MICHAEL

First of all you drive me crazy. Always have.

STEPHEN

Why?

MICHAEL

Because.

STEPHEN

Not good enough. Tell me.

MICHAEL

Because you're ... look, I don't want to do this ...

STEPHEN

No, tell me! I want to know.

MICHAEL

I don't know ... you're ... you're ...

STEPHEN

Tell me goddammit.

MICHAEL

Because ...

STEPHEN

Go on!

MICHAEL

Because you're so fucking gay.

STEPHEN

Bullshit. That's not it. You been in theatre your whole life. You gotta be used to it by now.

MICHAEL

It's different. You're my brother.

STEPHEN

You must know by now, it's not gonna rub off on you.

MICHAEL

It might. Now that I'm in a weakened condition.

STEPHEN

Oh, come on.

MICHAEL

Look! I just don't wanna live with two gay men, okay?

STEPHEN

You're lying. Tell me the real reason!

MICHAEL

Because you're a coward, Stephen, all right! You're a fucking coward.

STEPHEN

A coward?

MICHAEL

Yeah. You are. And you pretend you're not. That makes you a liar too.

STEPHEN

What the fuck are you talking about?

MICHAEL

You are, Stephen. You're the most self-deceiving life-long liar and coward I have ever known.

STEPHEN

I don't understand.

MICHAEL

Okay, here it is. You live this little controlled life, claiming it's all because you can't stand people. You and Lane both ... you climb in bed at seven o'clock every night after your fucking early bird dinner that you eat at home because you're too cheap to go out, and so fucking scared that all that cushy teacher retirement of yours won't last til the bitter end. You watch TV all day long, just like Dad did, which drives me crazy. He did it to block out Mom. You do it to block out everything.

STEPHEN

Oof!

MICHAEL

You don't go anywhere. You don't do anything. And you claim it's because the world sucks.

STEPHEN

That's what I think. So, what?

MICHAEL

Because that's not what it really is.

STEPHEN

So, what is it then?

MICHAEL

You're afraid of everything. Always have been. But you lie to yourself about it. Make excuses. Build walls made of lies to protect yourself. You've done this your whole life, Stephen. Things you won't do or take on – not because the world sucks – because you're afraid of everything. And you've convinced yourself it's true. But, it's all bullshit.

STEPHEN

You don't know me!

MICHAEL

Oh, come on, Stephen. You're transparent. Every year your world gets a little smaller, your whole adult life, until now, when there's almost nothing left. And that's the little world you pretend you like.

STEPHEN

Go on.

MICHAEL

No. I don't wanna do this?

STEPHEN

I said go on!

MICHAEL

Okay. Like I said. You don't go anywhere or do anything.

STEPHEN

That's my choice. Lane is not well, and if I make plans, half the time I can't keep them. Lane gets sick and I have to cancel. So why bother? Lane needs me.

MICHAEL

Lane says that's just an excuse. That he'll be all right for a coupla days and that you should go.

STEPHEN

That's his opinion. He won't admit that he's essentially an invalid. He needs me.

MICHAEL

You could arrange for someone to be available for a few fucking days, but you don't.

STEPHEN

All right. I disagree, but that's only one thing. Give me another example.

MICHAEL

Okay. When I had my surgery. For my ... whadayacallit ...

STEPHEN

Your knee? Okay ...

MICHAEL

Yeah. You insisted on coming down to ... you know ... where I lived ...

STEPHEN

St. Petersburg?

MICHAEL

Yeah, thank you. To Saint Pete and you were supposed to take care of me while I recovered from the whadayacallit

STEPHEN

The knee surgery, right ...

MICHAEL

And you had to leave the hospital every day by four o'clock cause you were afraid of getting lost in the dark.

STEPHEN

I don't get it. So?

MICHAEL

So, you left at fucking 4 o'clock. I still had half the fucking day to get through by myself cause you were afraid of getting lost in the dark. It was fucking St. Petersburg, Stephen, not Los Angeles, or Goddam Tokyo. You couldn't get lost if you were blindfolded, for god sakes. Helen Fucking Keller coulda found her way back to my place. It was only a mile from the goddam hospital.

STEPHEN

I disagree.

MICHAEL

With what? That it was a mile away? You could have walked.

STEPHEN

All right. Continue.

MICHAEL

And then. Every meal you ate alone; at my place. Every fucking meal you got from McDonalds.

STEPHEN

So what? I like McDonalds.

MICHAEL

You don't like it that much, little brother. You're gay, for god sakes. You ate there because it was next store to my apartment complex and you could walk there.

STEPHEN

So?

MICHAEL

Come on. You're fucking lying to yourself right now.

STEPHEN

No, I'm not.

MICHAEL

You ate every fucking meal at McDonalds because you were afraid to go any further than that. Even a fucking short ride down a two-lane road was too much.

STEPHEN

So, I don't like to drive in the dark, so what?

MICHAEL

But, you were supposed to be there to help me. And I had to let you go home because you were driving me crazy about the fucking directions and your concerns about getting lost.

STEPHEN

I don't remember that.

MICHAEL

Oh, no, you don't. That's my excuse.

STEPHEN

What else?

MICHAEL

And when I got home, even though I needed your help even more, I couldn't wait for you to go. All you talked about for days was your game plan for getting to the airport on time and how long you should leave yourself. I mean, you treated it like you were going on a voyage to the fucking ... what do you call it?

STEPHEN

The New World?

MICHAEL

No, Stephen, like fucking Mars!

STEPHEN

Okay, so maybe I am a little agoraphobic. So, what? That's my problem.

MICHAEL

And you made it mine. And you do that with everything. Your whole life.

STEPHEN

I strongly disagree.

MICHAEL

You were a seventh grade math teacher, Stephen.

STEPHEN

What's wrong with that?

MICHAEL

Nothing. I guess. If that's what you really wanted to do.

STEPHEN

It was what I wanted to do.

MICHAEL

Bullshit! This is exactly what I mean! You got 800 in your math SAT's, Stephen. You're a moron about everything else. But in math you were some kind of savant.

STEPHEN

So? Pure math is a tough field to get a job in.

MICHAEL

When did you even try? For over 30 years, all anyone ever heard from you was how much you hated teaching, but the retirement was gonna be great, you said, so you kept doing it. And no one could talk you out of it. Miserable for 30 years cause the retirement was gonna be good, when there were so many other things you could have been happier doing.

STEPHEN

I was good at it, okay? And it was easy.

MICHAEL

But if you hated ...

STEPHEN

Teaching.

MICHAEL

Thank you, then why did you keep doing it?

STEPHEN

I'm lazy. You know that.

MICHAEL

You were too afraid to try something else, Stephen. To try anything new.

STEPHEN

You're wrong.

MICHAEL

So, what about you and ... you know ...

STEPHEN

Lane, Michael! His name is Lane!

MICHAEL

You think I don't know that, Stephen? I couldn't get it off my tongue. Okay? That's what pissed you off?

STEPHEN

That didn't piss me off. It was all the other stuff.

MICHAEL

Yeah, well, my forgetting Lane's name was a good trigger. Imagine living with me when I get really bad. Having to take care of me when I'm just gonna get worse and meaner.

STEPHEN

What were you gonna say about me and Lane?

MICHAEL

Nothing. Look, the point is I'm an asshole, okay, and I'm not going to become any less of an asshole, and I don't want to live with two aging queens who don't really like each other.

STEPHEN

Now, why would you say something like that?

MICHAEL

Oh, I don't know. Cause it's true? And it's something else you lie to yourself about.

STEPHEN

Fuck you. I mean really.

MICHAEL

Okay, stow it. Sue's coming back on.

STEPHEN

No, I want to know. Why would you say that?

SUE

Say what?

MICHAEL

Nothing. Brother shit. What was that all about?

SUE

Just school stuff.

MICHAEL

Share with us. What's the life of a school administrator like in the time of Covid?

SUE

Oh, God! You don't want to hear this shit. Really.

MICHAEL

No, I do. What is it like in the trenches our President forced you into?

STEPHEN

Yeah, I'm so glad I'm out of that! I mean with Covid and all.

MICHAEL

Yeah, and you only had to wait 30 years. In geologic time that's nothing.

Stephen glares at Michael.

SUE

Stop it, Michael. You are so mean.

MICHAEL

That's what I've been trying to say. You were saying?

SUE

Well, like I told you. No one including Trish, she's our head of school, wanted to open live in the first place. But the board was putting heavy pressure on to open.

STEPHEN

That's the downside of private school.

SUE

Among others.

MICHAEL

I thought rich, educated Republicans would be smart enough not to do that.

SUE

Well, think again. At 20 grand a pop, sitting at home with a bored mommy forced to supervise the kids on a full-time basis doesn't cut it. So, we had to finally open to a full load.

STEPHEN

That makes no sense.

SUE

Tell me about it.

MICHAEL

And?

SUE

What do you think?

MICHAEL

They're starting to drop like Jeff Goldbergs?

SUE

Gold-blums!

STEPHEN

What does that mean?

SUE

He means drop like flies. Sorry Stephen. That was from an earlier conversation.

STEPHEN

I liked the first one better. But Jeff Goldblum was great.

MICHAEL

Humph! So, are they starting to drop like flies?

SUE

Not yet. But we've only been open at full for a week, and there are already five cases.

MICHAEL

That's not bad.

SUE

Yeah, but with tracing, there are already an average of five per class who are sitting at home quarantined for two weeks. So, what was the point of opening at full in the first place?

MICHAEL

Oh, you liberals overthink everything. Just roll with fearless leader. It's so much easier.

SUE

Says who?

STEPHEN

How *is* Fred, by the way?

SUE
Same as always.

STEPHEN
How can you stand it?

SUE
What do you mean, and look who's talking?

MICHAEL
Hear that, little brother?

STEPHEN
Like I said, fuck you, Michael.

MICHAEL
He loves me.

SUE
What's going on here?

STEPHEN
Nothing, Sis. You were telling us about Fred.

SUE
Fred's fine.

STEPHEN
What's it like living with a Trumper?

SUE
Fred's not a Trumper.

MICHAEL
Oh, yeah, right!

SUE
He's not!

MICHAEL
Then how would you describe him?

SUE
A moderate Republican who took a chance.

STEPHEN

You mean played Russian Roulette.

MICHAEL

Wait a second. Don't give Fred that much credit. He didn't know the Roulette was gonna be so Russian.

SUE

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, Fred has come around a bit.

MICHAEL

She said almost four years later.

STEPHEN

What does "come around" mean, anyway?

SUE

He told me on the night the death count hit 200, 000 that he wasn't voting Republican this time.

STEPHEN

Good for Fred.

MICHAEL

Come on! That's too little, too late. I mean kids ripped away from parents. Kept in cages. Endless lies. In the pocket of the Russians, for Christ sake. Supporting dictators. Quid pro fucking quo with the ... the ...

SUE

Ukraine.

STEPHEN

Ukraine!

MICHAEL

Yeah! Thanks! Destroying the Constitution. All it took was a little push in the right direction, huh?

SUE

Okay, Michael. Cut him some slack, okay? It's not easy for him. His first vote for president was for Goldwater.

MICHAEL

Yeah, remember the good old days when we thought Goldwater was a lunatic? In hindsight, he seems like George Washington. Are you guys impressed?

SUE

With what?

MICHAEL

I remembered his name.

STEPHEN

Who? Washington?

MICHAEL

I don't remember.

SUE

Yes, you do.

MICHAEL

Yes, I do. George M. Washington.

STEPHEN

That's George M. Cohan!

MICHAEL

Who's he?

STEPHEN

You know. Our tap dancing first president. He was played by Joel Gray in the musical.

MICHAEL

Cagney in the movie. Who was better?

STEPHEN

Joey Gray!

MICHAEL

You're so gay!

STEPHEN

Yeah? Well, I wasn't always. I was married, remember?

MICHAEL

You were always gay, Stephen. Only you seemed to miss that fact.

STEPHEN

He's picking on me, Sis.

SUE

It's true, Stephen. You were the last to arrive at the station.

MICHAEL

So, who was better; Joel Gray or Cagney?

SUE

They were both great, all right? They both made America great again!

STEPHEN

Absolutely.

MICHAEL

Ha!

MICHAEL

Remember back in the 60's when patriotism started to become a bad thing?

STEPHEN

You mean to you radical college boys.

SUE

And girls.

MICHAEL

Naw. You were more interested in abortion rights and shit.

SUE

That is absolutely not true and unfair.

MICHAEL

Is that so?

SUE

Yes, it is so. I marched for Civil Rights and for the end of the War.

STEPHEN

Which one?

MICHAEL

You have a point. But, guys were like more focused against John Wayne and Bob Hope and all that macho patriotic bullshit that was being used to drum up support for the War.

SUE

As I recall, Jane Fonda was not a guy.

MICHAEL

Yeah, touché on that one, Sis. I mean, *Barbarella*, right?

STEPHEN

I never saw it.

MICHAEL

Figures.

SUE

He was probably too young, Michael.

MICHAEL

Okay.

STEPHEN

I like Jane Fonda.

MICHAEL

But, I was talking about girls in general.

SUE

Women, Michael. Women.

MICHAEL

Okay, okay. I meant women.

STEPHEN

Words count, asshole.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry.

SUE

So, what was your point?

MICHAEL

Well, I couldn't see it back then, but now I realize that patriotism was important. It reminded us what our country was supposed to stand for. I mean we were born after World War II, right? And that sorta defined us. Even if half of it was bullshit, it gave us a bar to live up to, you know? Kids today, they don't have that.

STEPHEN

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

Well, take Ryan, for instance. He could give a shit. I mean about politics.

STEPHEN

What about Hannah? She gives a shit.

MICHAEL

Okay, that's true.

SUE

Hannah's very patriotic.

MICHAEL

Okay. But, hear me out. After fighting Hitler and the Japs ...

SUE

Japanese, Michael.

MICHAEL

I know that, Sis. I'm just expressing myself like John Wayne would in one of those movies I saw as a kid.

SUE

That doesn't make it okay, you know?

MICHAEL

Could I just make my point without the PC police interrupting every fucking second?

SUE

Go ahead.

STEPHEN

But, watch your phrasing.

MICHAEL

Okay, my PC LBGTQ XYZ Brother. What I'm trying to say is – after all the propaganda our parents took in, either fighting the war or supporting it back home – you know, Rosie the ... the

SUE

Riveter.

STEPHEN

Riveter.

MICHAEL

Right. Rosie the Riveter – fighting for freedom, all that shit, our dads came home to glory and we all ate it up as kids. And we believed it and tried, at least in public, to live up to it. But, by the time we were in college, we thought it was all bullshit, not because it wasn't good shit to believe in, but because Uncle Sam didn't really live up to any of it.

STEPHEN

I agree with you. And, so, we mostly raised our kids without it.

SUE

It's true. I don't hear any of that kind of attitude in school any more. Not for years now. Even after 911, it was mostly empty rhetoric. I mean Viet Nam spoiled the illusion, right?

MICHAEL

And, look where we are now?

SUE

Where are we?

MICHAEL

In a world led by a game show host where the game no longer has any rules.

STEPHEN

That's good. Where did you read that?

MICHAEL

You think I remember? Maybe I made it up myself. Either way, it's true though. I mean, remember *The Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie*? I mean now people won't even wear masks to protect each other.

STEPHEN

It's the new American way, right? Me over everyone else!

SUE

It's all so sad.

STEPHEN

And it's all Trump's fault.

MICHAEL

Don't forget to remind, Fred, Sis!

SUE

I'm telling you, he got the message.

STEPHEN

Our sense of community, you know? Where did it go?

MICHAEL

The shit our parents believed in and taught us, we never passed it forward.

SUE

We were too busy getting rich.

STEPHEN

And fat.

MICHAEL

And stupid. I mean who ever thought the world could get flat again.

SUE

Or that education would be scorned?

STEPHEN

Or that teachers should make less than trash men.

SUE

Do we?

STEPHEN

I'm afraid to find out.

MICHAEL

You probably do. And who do our kids have as role models today? Kim Kardashian?

SUE

Don Draper? Tony Soprano?

STEPHEN

Lance Armstrong?

MICHAEL

Mitch McConnell?

SUE

Stop! This is all too sad.

MICHAEL

Every institution has been tarnished now. Every fucking one.

STEPHEN

Even *Game of Thrones* couldn't make it to the finish line untarnished.

MICHAEL

I'm surprised you watched it.

STEPHEN

Dragons, Michael, dragons! Come on!

MICHAEL

From doctors to the President of the United States. No one can be trusted.

SUE

This is so sad. And so true.

STEPHEN

No wonder the most recent *Superman* and the *Lone Ranger* flopped.

SUE

Yeah, kids don't believe in those values anymore.

MICHAEL

Maybe, but those movies really did suck.

STEPHEN

Yeah, and some kids still have values. A lot of millennials do.

SUE

Gen Xers do too.

STEPHEN

Hanna does; that's for sure. She's all about the environment, climate change, Black Lives Matter. She's right there. I'm very proud of my daughter.

Stephen's phone rings; he continues to talk while he is looking at his phone and reading at the same time.

MICHAEL

That's *our* kids. But what about all the blue-collar kids who were taught to disdain education and ... and uh ... uh ... science ... and ... um ... um ... um...

SUE

What is it, Michael? Are you all right? Michael! Michael!

Michael continues to be out of it for several seconds.

MICHAEL

(recovering) Yeah, yeah. I'm okay. Forget it. I ... uh ... just ... a ... totally blanked. I don't even know what the fuck we're talking about. Sorry.

SUE

That's okay.

MICHAEL

It's not okay. It's not fucking okay.

STEPHEN

(still focused on phone and texting) Too many people don't even know how to think anymore. They think ignorance is a virtue. Thinking is just too fucking hard.

MICHAEL

Are you talking about the kids today, or me? Cause that was a fucking lousy segue.

SUE

Of course he wasn't talking about you, Michael. Come on!

STEPHEN

(looking up, finally) What's going on? I wasn't talking about you, big brother. Only you would make a joke like that. Look, I've gotta deal with Lane. He's been texting me from upstairs. He's got a bug up his ass. I'll be back.

SUE

Don't take too long, okay?

STEPHEN

(distracted) I won't. *(He's gone)*

SUE

Are you okay?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I guess.

SUE

What happened?

MICHAEL

I don't know. It was like I short-circuited or something. Like my screen just went blank.

SUE

Has that happened before?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Sorta. Yeah, it has. But not like this.

SUE

You know, Michael, maybe it's time to start thinking about what you're gonna do.

MICHAEL

Oh, for Christ sake, not you too.

SUE

Well, you're going to have to face it, Michael. Sooner or later.

MICHAEL

Let's make it later, okay? I already went through this with Stephen.

SUE

Is that why you were being such an ass to him?

MICHAEL

I guess so. He pisses me off, you know?

SUE

He was just trying to be kind to you. You know he doesn't have a mean bone in his body.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Well, that pisses me off too.

SUE

Seems like everything does these days.

MICHAEL

Well, why shouldn't it?

SUE

Did Stephen ask you to move in with him?

MICHAEL

Sorta. Yeah.

SUE

And that pissed you off?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

SUE

Why would that piss you off? Your brother loves you. He wants to help you.

MICHAEL

Because it was an empty gesture.

SUE

How was it an empty gesture?

MICHAEL

Because he knows I'd never do it.

SUE

Why not?

MICHAEL

Because he knows I know he's full of shit.

SUE

How so?

MICHAEL

Look. I don't want to get into it, okay?

SUE

Well, you're gonna have to do something. You could move in with us.

MICHAEL

Oh, right. You're still working. What? Is Fred gonna take care of me?

SUE

He would.

MICHAEL

Get real, okay?

SUE

Why does Stephen piss you off so much?

You're right. I mean about Stephen. He's been in some sort of denial game his whole life, but that's his choice. His loss. How is that like you?

MICHAEL

Cause I've always been just as scared as he is, but sometimes it makes me so ashamed that I do things anyway.

SUE

So, then, you're not a coward. That takes even more guts, I'd say.

MICHAEL

Maybe. But, for every thing I *have* done, there are 20 that I didn't. Things I wanted really bad, but didn't act on them. Cause I was too afraid.

SUE

We all do that, Michael.

MICHAEL

Maybe. But in our family it's almost a rule. We're all scared of our own shadows. Dad, his mother before him. Who knows how far back it goes.

SUE

Do we check ancestors.com for that, or one of those genetic tests?

MICHAEL

Don't make a joke of this, okay.

SUE

I'm not, Michael. It's just ...

MICHAEL

In case you haven't noticed, Sis; fear is not the way great things are accomplished in this world. That is not how you make your life mean something.

SUE

So, what are you saying? You think your life hasn't meant anything?

MICHAEL

Not enough.

SUE

Well, what were you expecting? Not everyone gets to be Leonardo DaVinci, or Shakespeare, you know?

MICHAEL

Believe me, I know. But, if they had let their fears get in the way, they wouldn't have done what they did, been who they were.

SUE

I'm sorry to tell you this, Michael, but whatever these fears were that held you back, you were not going to be a Shakespeare or a Leonardo, your ego notwithstanding.

MICHAEL

I realize that, Susan. I'm not delusional. Yet.

SUE

So, what the hell didn't you do that was so important?

MICHAEL

Oh, fuck, Sue. I don't want to sit here and cry to you about what my life didn't give me. It's all my fault anyway. I'm just trying to tell you why Stephen drives me crazy.

SUE

No, tell me. What didn't you do?

MICHAEL

I coulda been a contender, all right?

SUE

You're no Marlon Brando, either.

MICHAEL

I know, Susan, believe me. I am totally aware of that fact.

SUE

Then what?

MICHAEL

Stephen reminds me of who I am. Of what I am. And I hate it. And only now, with the utmost clarity, I realize it; now, when my mind is going, and it's too late.

SUE

Just tell me what you didn't do that was so important. That kept you from all the success you never saw.

MICHAEL

It wasn't the success, Sue. Don't you get it? It was that I didn't even try. I never went after a lot of things that I should have.

SUE

Oh, for fuck sake, just tell me one goddam thing already.

MICHAEL

I didn't keep swimming in college. Every time I started writing something, I didn't finish it -- cause I was afraid it wasn't good enough. I stopped acting, okay? I hated the rejection. I was afraid that I wasn't good enough there either. But, I was even more afraid to hear it. So, I just gave it up. I did that with everything.

SUE

You made a good decision about the acting, Michael. You became a first-rate drama/lit professor. Your students loved you. Your acting was never that great in the first place.

MICHAEL

Now she tells me.

SUE

The point is you made the right decision. So, tell me something else.

MICHAEL

I'm too embarrassed.

SUE

I'm not gonna stop until you tell me.

MICHAEL

Like I said there are a thousand things.

SUE

Just tell me one.

MICHAEL

(after a pause) I always thought I could do stand-up, maybe. Or write comedy.

SUE

Ha! Really?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

SUE

Okay. Well, you are funny. I guess. As your sister, it's hard to be sure.

MICHEAL

Gee, thanks, Sis!

SUE

And you do write pretty well.

MICHAEL

I know.

SUE

But, that modesty. So, why didn't you do it?

MICHAEL

Were you not listening?

SUE

You didn't have the guts.

MICHAEL

That's right.

SUE

Hmmm. So? Do it now.

MICHAEL

Yeah, right.

SUE

I mean it. Do it now.

MICHAEL

I can't.

SUE

Why not?

MICHAEL

I can't even remember my name half the time. How am I gonna remember a comedy routine?

SUE

I don't know. Write it first, and then see.

MICHAEL

Okay. Nothing to it. If only I could remember where my computer is. Or where I live. Or what I thought five seconds ago.

SUE

Stop making excuses, Michael. You're not your brother.

STEPHEN

But, *I* am!

SUE

Were you just sitting there listening to us?

STEPHEN

Sorta.

MICHAEL

How much did you hear?

STEPHEN

Enough. I am so glad Zoom has this video on/off button.

MICHAEL

Great.

STEPHEN

So now that everything's your fault and you don't hate me, when you moving in?

MICHAEL

I'm not moving in with you, Stephen.

STEPHEN

Why not?

MICHAEL

You're still gay. And I still don't want to live with two aging queens who don't like each other.

STEPHEN

I think his mind is going.

SUE

I think you're right.

MICHAEL

You're both wrong. It's already gone, long gone.

SUE

You know we both love you, Michael.

STEPHEN
Please speak for yourself, okay?

MICHAEL
I love you, Stephen.

STEPHEN
I love you too, big brother.

MICHAEL
And, Sue, you've always been the best of us.

STEPHEN
And we love you most.

They throw kisses at each other.

MICHAEL
Okay, gotta go. I mean before I throw up. This has been too overwhelming. What's left of my brain has been overtaxed. And I must rest now.

STEPHEN
Think about it, Michael.

SUE
About everything!

They wave and say bye. Michael's screen goes blank. Sue and Stephen look at each other.

SCENE 2

STEPHEN
Hey, Sis! How ya holding up?

SUE
I'm fine, I guess.

STEPHEN
All things considered, right?

SUE

Yeah, considering our country is hanging on by a thread, and democracy is dangling with it.

STEPHEN

And right below, the crocodile waits with its mouth wide open.

SUE

“No worries”, as the kids say, right?

STEPHEN

Yah, man, life is good.

SUE

I can't believe it's already been a month since he passed.

STEPHEN

I know. I was just saying that to Lane.

SUE

So, cutting to the chase, did you watch it?

STEPHEN

Of course, I watched it.

SUE

How many times?

STEPHEN

Five, I think.

SUE

I watched it at least that many.

STEPHEN

The first time I really couldn't take it in.

SUE

Me, too.

STEPHEN

I was too busy sobbing.

SUE

I wonder what Michael would say to that?

STEPHEN

“You’re so fucking gay, Stephen.”

SUE

Uh-huh. But the second time ...

STEPHEN

Yeah. It made me totally forget how much I hated him.

SUE

You did not hate him.

STEPHEN

Yes, I did. I mean when I forgot how much I loved him.

SUE

Yeah.

STEPHEN

I mean he really did push it with me, you know.

SUE

I know. He couldn’t help it.

STEPHEN

Yes, he could. But he didn’t want to.

SUE

Maybe. You pushed his buttons. Maybe, he needed his buttons pushed.

STEPHEN

Always the peacemaker. Thank God for the middle child.

SUE

We all play our roles, Stephen.

STEPHEN

And according to Michael, mine was to be a coward who wasted his life.

SUE

I know.

STEPHEN

What’s that supposed to mean?

SUE

Oh, come on, you know he told me.

STEPHEN

Yeah, I heard some of that, but I didn't really get it all at the time. I was too busy being mad and trying to pretend that I wasn't.

SUE

Yeah, he was good at that. When he knew he was losing it faster than he anticipated, he did a lot of – what's the word – reckoning, I guess.

STEPHEN

Provocation is more like it?

SUE

He was just doing an accounting of all his shoulda/couldas, you know. He said he coulda been a contender, but he didn't really blame you, only himself.

STEPHEN

I'm surprised he didn't think of me as his Rod Steiger. I'm too macho, I guess.

SUE

Yeah. Sorry.

STEPHEN

So, what else did he say?

SUE

Frankly, I thought some of it was ridiculous at the time. I thought it was just the Alzheimer's talking.

STEPHEN

Like what?

SUE

Like when he said he thought he coulda been a good stand-up comedian. I mean come on! Of all things, a stand-up comedian. Gimme a break!

STEPHEN

Well, based on what we saw ... I mean pretty fucking good.

SUE

He said he didn't have the guts to do it. So, I told him to write it first. I mean he did say, comedy writing would have been okay, too.

STEPHEN

Yeah? I mean who wouldda thunk, right?

SUE

Yeah. When he was telling me his list of things he was too afraid to do and standup came up, I told him to do it. I mean, what did he have to lose. If he sucked, or was humiliated, he wouldn't remember anyway, right?

STEPHEN

Ha! Maybe, *you* should be doing the stand-up.

SUE

Sorry. My stuff would be way too dark. Anyway, he said he was too far gone to memorize an act.

STEPHEN

And?

SUE

That's when I told him to write the damn thing first and then worry about it.

STEPHEN

And he did?

SUE

I guess so.

STEPHEN

He never listened to a fucking thing I ever told him to do.

SUE

Well, he listened to me, and some of what he wrote was pretty damn good.

STEPHEN

Yeah, well, that's just his sister talking.

SUE

Okay, right. Haters gotta hate. So, what did you think?

STEPHEN

“Good,” he said grudgingly. Professional level good.

SUE

He could really string those words together.

STEPHEN

Yeah, like fucking George Carlin.

SUE

Let’s not push it.

STEPHEN

Yeah, okay, but still

SUE

Yeah.

STEPHEN

Yeah.

SUE

Which part did you like the best?

STEPHEN

There were a lotta parts I liked.

SUE

I mean if you had to pick – you know, for the documentary.

STEPHEN

You mean the mockumentary?

SUE

Did I tell you that story?

STEPHEN

You mean about Jeff Goldblum?

SUE

Yeah.

STEPHEN

Three times, at least.

SUE

Sorry. It's funny though, right?

STEPHEN

Yeah. Couldn't do that to him too often.

SUE

Well, he was already on his way down, I suspect.

STEPHEN

Yeah. So, what were your favorite parts?

SUE

I liked the part about the organs of the body, you know, comparing them to a pipe organ, and government.

STEPHEN

You mean the government that doesn't work.

SUE

Yeah. That was funny ... and pretty damn clever ...

STEPHEN

Yeah.

SUE

And the ending, of course.

STEPHEN

Read the part about the organs.

SUE

You're kidding, right?

STEPHEN

Uh-uh. Read it. Please.

SUE

I can't.

STEPHEN

Come on. I like the way you read.

SUE

I can't. I'll get upset.

STEPHEN

Look, you said you wanted to talk about him. What better way could we celebrate him? He'd like that.

SUE

All right. I'll try. But I'm not sure I can. Let's see. Let me find it. *(A pause)*. Okay, I got it.

STEPHEN

Do it like he would.

SUE

Stop being so assertive.

STEPHEN

That's a laugh. Do it for Michael.

SUE

Okay. Here goes.

She begins to read. After the first few lines, Michael appears on the screen. He is mouthing the words as though he is delivering the piece. They continue to speak in tandem for a bit and then Michael's voice takes over. Toward the end of the monologue Sue re-enters and takes on the dialogue.

SUE/MICHAEL

“Okay. Moving on. The next subject is “My Internal Organs.”

Organs? Ever wonder why the name for the largest musical instrument ever created by human beings has the same name as all those vital parts that keep the body running? Well I have. Here's where I prove my creds as a college professor, and, of course, where I get to show my combination of actual knowledge combined with a good deal of *assumption*, *presumption*, and a lot of guesswork, or as we call it in the profession, *bullshit*. But, here's my take. The organs of our body each have a very important and specific function. Each organ works independently, yet also has to work in conjunction with all the other organs, and then, the rest of our fucking bodies. You know – like an **organization** – lots of important individual sectors all working together to somehow to meet its goals, which is, most of the time, to *fuck over* some other group or set of individuals. Which is what happens when an organ isn't working right. It's the same with the musical instrument where there are a vast number of pipes that can work individually, but mostly in groups, determined by the *key board* – get it? Every organization has a board – to make beautiful music. Just like the body. When the organs of our body work together well, our bodies make beautiful music in harmony. But when they don't, our bodies go flat or sharp or just don't work at all – physical cacophony, let's say. Pretty good metaphor, right?

Well, when you hit 70, the body's key signatures get really weird; sharps and flats start appearing all over the place, and the whole body starts getting really off key. And again, I'm not going to name names here, because I want to protect the innocent. But I do wonder why I feel like I have to piss every five minutes -- And what mother-fucking organ I should be blaming.

Okay, that's it. No more. My scientific experiment to make a funny routine about shit that ain't even close to funny is coming to an end now; just like my health, as it quickly unravels. Shakespeare said it best when he described in his famous speech from *As You Like It*, where Jaques is telling his pals about the seven stages of man and gets to the last couple of stages:

The sixth age shifts (I'm sparing you the first five here)
into the lean and slippered pantaloons, (that means like pajamas and slippers)
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side; (they had pouches back then before pockets
were invented, I guess)
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; (that's a tongue twister; it means you shrivel up a lot when you get
really old)
and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion, (you know, like Alzheimer's and shit)
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, (see, just like I told you) sans everything.

SUE/MICHAEL

He got that right. Once you're getting old, you start to appreciate it. No wonder that guy could afford to build his own theatre. But enough of this!"

SUE

That's right. Enough of this! (*Michael disappears. Sue and Stephen share a silent moment.*)

STEPHEN

More, please. Come on, Michael. Give us some more.

SUE

If he only could.

STEPHEN

That was pretty damn good, Sue. You did a great job.

SUE

Yeah, I think Michael was grokking me.

STEPHEN

Grokking? What the fuck is grokking?

SUE

You're kidding, right?

STEPHEN

Nope.

SUE

Mind melding. Robert Heinlein. *Stranger in a Strange Land?*

STEPHEN

Before my time.

SUE

The hell it was. You were just too lazy to read.

STEPHEN

Guilty as charged. But that was pretty damn good, he said grudgingly. Only Michael *would* come up with a stand-up act about getting old and what it does to you. That's so ...

SUE

Michael?

STEPHEN

Yeah.

SUE

The Baby Boomer's shared nightmare, right?

STEPHEN

Yep. I would think so. Read some more.

SUE

No way.

STEPHEN

Way, I say. Come on. You're good. Grokk him again.

SUE

It was sorta fun. Okay, okay. I'll do the ending.

STEPHEN

Great. No critics here.

SUE

That's a relief. Okay, here goes.

"There are a number of cultural requirements of aging -- I mean like things I thought I'd never catch myself doing or saying; You know, like talking and eating at the same time.

Michael enters about here, mouthing the words at first and then his voice takes over. Michael is now dressed in a tux and is performing with a microphone. His background suggest a comedy club; perhaps he is on a black and white screen. Sue and Stephen disappear as Michael takes over.

I mean, my parents taught me manners for Christ sake, and they were real sticklers. I'd get sent from the table if I even tried to talk with my mouth full. Yet, both my parents, when they got old, did that all the fucking time. It was like they knew they didn't have much time left so felt the need to multi-task or something. Sitting across from them while eating when they were in their 80's was sorta like having a conversation with a pair of semi-intelligent garbage disposals. Fortunately, I haven't caught myself doing that yet.

But lately, I do catch myself saying shit that used to drive me crazy when old people said it. You know, things like **Back in my day** ... Or **when I was a kid, blah blah blah**. I mean **back in my day** should be referring to things circa 1920, right, Boomers? You know, like the things our grandparents said:

The ice man used to deliver a big chunk right to the house with a pair of tongs, and he'd put it right into the icebox. Or I can remember delivery wagons that were still pulled by horses, and horseshit covered the streets and it really stunk. Or I remember when a Coke and Hershey bars were only a nickel, and they were so much bigger then, too. I think everything cost a nickel back then. I hated that shit, and now I've begun to say the same kind o' crap.

Like this one. I can remember when milk was delivered to my door, in glass bottles no less, and I remember when the paper container replaced those bottles. And mayonnaise and ketchup were in glass bottles like they still should be, not this bullshit plastic. And I remember watching TV on an 8-inch screen with fuzzy reception and we had rabbit ear antennas that we would put aluminum foil on for better reception. And I remember going to the neighbor's house to watch *Peter Pan* with Mary Martin cause they had one of those amazing new color TV's where the skin on white people had blotches of red that would float around. And I remember having to adjust the horizontal and vertical knobs on the TV when the picture started flipping. And I remember when that last soldier from the civil war died at 103. And I remember the invention of the Slinky, and the whiffle ball, and the hula hoop, and Barbie and GI Joe. And Mattel's Fanner 50 and the Winchester back in the good old days when it was still okay to play with toy guns. And my big Schwinn bike and roller skates with a key, and no fucking helmets necessary. And playing in the streets, and knowing the people in your neighborhood, before kids got kidnapped or molested or murdered. When cowboys shot the gun out of your hand rather than making a bloodbath of you. When heroes were actually good, and people did the right thing and kids were taught to do the right thing. I remember when Doctors and lawyers and politicians were people to look up to. When everybody smoked and it was okay to do it inside your house. When family secrets stayed secret. When no one was offended when a prayer was said or the bible was read before we started class in the morning. And we walked home for lunch, and our mothers were there to feed us because they didn't have to work too, just to pay the rent. And I remember life before everyone had an air conditioner, and we all had to sit outside on a summer evening chatting with each other until it cooled down enough to go to sleep. Ah, back in my day, those were the days, before oil and plastic and climate change, before it was conceivable that polar bears, and lions and elephants could become extinct. When going to the moon was a dream, not a contest. When the Twilight Zone was more of a warning of what might be, not of what will be. Yeah Back in my days, back in the good old days ... back when my bones and joints didn't ache, and my back was straight, and my hair was thick, and I could remember the names to people, places, and things. And everything worked, and I knew everything would get even better for my children and theirs. Back when going to Mars was an adventure, not an exit strategy.

Sorry. I guess that was sorta depressing too. Huh? You're depressed, and I'm exhausted. Sounds like the blurb for a real successful evening of comedy. But at least I made it through my routine!

Sue and Stephen re-enter visually here. Sue continues to mouth the words until about "You gotta live as it comes", and then her voice slowly takes over. After she say, "Now that I've done this, it won't even be scary", Michael repeats the line on voice.

Right, Sue? And thanks for getting me to do it, BTW. The two of you have been a great audience. Stephen and Sue, ladies and gentlemen! My brother and sister! The two of you

have been a great, loving audience, truly. And special thanks to you, Sue! Cause at least now I know. I tried it. And I did it! And I *coulda* been a contender. But, so what, right? You gotta live it as it comes, and learn from it! And, at least now I know the glass was always half full, right? And, I just managed to knock off another item on my bucket list. Next week – maybe I write a novel. Who knows! Now that I’ve done *this*, it won’t even be scary!”

MICHAEL

Now that I’ve done *this*, it won’t even be scary.

Michael stays on screen and reacts silently to the rest.

STEPHEN

Fantastic, Sue. Thank you. I wonder why comedians never talk about aging?

SUE

First of all, there are so many young ones ...

STEPHEN

There are still plenty of the old legends around.

SUE

But they’re all too busy trying to be relevant.

STEPHEN

Or like the rest of us Boomers, not wanting to face the truth.

SUE

Who wants to acknowledge, at least in public, that they’re falling apart – rapidly?

STEPHEN

I guess. It reminds people of death.

SUE

And their own mortality.

STEPHEN

Hilarious subjects, right?

SUE

Michael seemed to make it work.

STEPHEN

But he never actually talked about death, I mean directly.

SUE

No, maybe that was coming in his follow-up act.

STEPHEN

Yeah, maybe. Or maybe he was too afraid.

SUE

Aren't we all.

STEPHEN

Yeah, well. That ending was really something, though.

SUE

It was like a montage.

STEPHEN

Of our lives as boomers, right?

SUE

Hmmph.

STEPHEN

Hey, Sue. Do you think he woulda actually ... ? I mean if he ...

SUE

Woulda what?

STEPHEN

You know. I mean ... if Corona Virus hadn't got him first.

SUE

You mean would he have offed himself?

STEPHEN

Yeah.

SUE

I don't know, Stephen. That takes a lot more guts than I could ever muster. But one thing I do know ...

STEPHEN

What's that?

SUE

He never would have agreed to live with either of us.

STEPHEN

You got that right. Not while he was still in his right mind, anyway. I mean, would you?

SUE

You gotta point.

STEPHEN

So, maybe COVID did one good thing.

SUE

No, Stephen. That's a bridge too far.

STEPHEN

Yeah, you're right. That was Trump-think leaking in.

SUE

Damn right.

STEPHEN

I can't believe we never got to see him after he got sick.

SUE

Yeah. It really brings it home when it's your own family being denied.

STEPHEN

He probably wouldn't have wanted us there anyway.

SUE

He didn't have the strength to argue. At least at the end.

STEPHEN

Can I still wish that motherfucker would die of COVID?

SUE

What?

STEPHEN

I mean Trump, not Michael.

SUE

Oh! I was about to get really upset. For a second, I thought you were starting to lose it, too.

STEPHEN

Not yet, Sis. Thank God. So, can I?

SUE

Yeah, I guess so. I mean now that Trump's immune, it's probably okay to wish him dead.

STEPHEN

How long does immunity last, anyway?

SUE

I don't think we know yet.

STEPHEN

Then I'll keep wishing.

SUE

It's always good to keep hope alive. And on that happy thought ...

STEPHEN

We wish for better days.

SUE

And say, "Goodnight, Michael. We love you."

STEPHEN

We love you, Michael! And, I love you, Sis. You really are the best of us.

SUE

I love you, too, Stephen. Sleep well.

STEPHEN

I will. Promise. *(he throws her a kiss; then turns off his screen).*

Susan and Michael have a moment together on screen and he throws her a kiss. They turn off their screens at the same time.

End of play

Note: The play was written to be performed in the Zoom format, so I made no decisions about costuming or set, other than what is noted in the stage directions of the play.