

Immediate Family

A monologue by Terry Baum

1983

Scene One

[Darkness. The soft pulsing sound of a respirator is heard. This continues throughout the play. The lights slowly fade up on a chair and a nightstand such as might be found in a hospital room. There is a pitcher filled with water and wilted flowers, and a drinking glass on the night stand. A wastebasket sits on the floor. Upstage there is a door which is half open. There is nothing else. VIRGINIA enters. She is in her middle fifties, and is wearing a post office uniform. She is a bulldyke. That is, her manner, walk and haircut are 'masculine' in a stereotypical way. She is carrying a bag of groceries and a bunch of flowers. Several letters stick out of her back pocket. Virginia stops and stares at the space in front of the chair and bedside stand, which is where the hospital bed would be. VIRGINIA talks to the imaginary person lying in the imaginary bed.]

Hello there, Rosie. How's my girl? Look what I got today!

[She waves the flowers in the face of the imaginary person in bed.]

Pretty, aren't they? They're called... Hell, I can't remember what they're called. Anyhow, they smell good.

[She points to the flowers already in the pitcher.]

Look at those poor old things! Drooping already, and I only brought them yesterday. I'm telling you, Rosie, this hospital air'll kill anything that breathes.

[She throws the old flowers in the wastebasket and arranges the new ones in the pitcher.]⁴

There, that's better.

[She sits down]

So, Rose. How's your coma going? I see the old respirator's doing its thing.

[Sings] "The res – res – respirator bob – bob – bobbing along." How're you feeling, Rosie? *[Pause]* Are you feeling, Rosie?

[Pause. VIRGINIA sets her bag of groceries down, slumps in the chair.]

Had a hard day at work today, my girl. We got a whole shitload of mail dumped on us. Had to work like hell. And then I spent my entire lunch hour shopping for groceries. You know, they had artichokes¹ for sale today, those great big ones.

[She pulls a very large artichoke out of her shopping bag.]

It was only one pound fifty! How about that! Pretty good for such a big one. Now, Rosie, I know what you're going to say. You're going to tell me I'm being extravagant. But you could eat three or four of those stupid little artichokes, and they won't fill you up nearly as good as one of these big ones like this. I don't care what you say, I think it's a bargain. And this is what I'm going to have for dinner tonight when I get home from the hospital. Oh, and I got one of these things too, from the Pound Shop.

[She pulls out a cheap back scratcher. Pause.]

¹ If artichokes not available, use an aubergine, and modify dialogue.

I get so itchy since you aren't there to... I don't know why I brought all this stuff in. I suppose I thought you might like to look at an artichoke. Pretty silly-looking thing, isn't it? Sunflower on steroids.

[She throws the artichoke back in the bag. She searches for a topic of conversation.]

Hey, Rose. You'll never guess what I had for dinner last night, not in a million years. Come on, try! *[Pause]* Oh, you give up too easy.

[Dramatically] Brussels sprouts! Me! – Can you believe it? Smelly green golf balls, I used to call them. Stunk out the whole house. And the farts! Had to have the windows open for hours, whatever the weather. I just ate them cos you love them. You say I'm not the romantic type, but here I am gobbling up these methane dynamos because they were – are – your favourite just so as I can... I don't know... have you inside me somehow.

Oh Rosie, how I've changed! I'm doing all those things you wanted me to. True. Believe me. If you came home today we'd never have another argument for the rest of our lives. *[Leaning forward]* You know, Rose, you were right. It's not so hard to keep the house looking nice. Neat as a pin, in fact. You just can't let it get out of control. Once you let it slide... oh, two or three weeks or so... then you've got a real mess on your hands. But if you attend to it, maybe fifteen, twenty minutes a day, it's easy-peasy. I'm telling you Rose, I'm a new woman. The house is so clean you can eat Brussels sprouts off the floor.

[Pause]

Rose, did I tell you I talked to the Matron today. I think it was the Matron, might have been the Sister, but she's the head nurse anyway.

"Now, listen to me, please," I said to her. I don't get off work till half past five. By the time I get down here, find a place to park, it's six o'clock. Six-fifteen, even. And then the visiting hours are over at six-forty-five. Do you mind if I stay a little longer, I says to her. Under the circumstances.

Do you know what she had the gall to say to me?

"Well, Miss Sedgeway, are you related to Miss Belasco in any way by blood?"

You tell me, Rose, how a Sedgeway and a Belasco are likely to be related by blood. It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard. So I said no.

"Are you related by marriage?" she asked.

I said to her, "I am Miss Belasco's... best friend."

"Oh, just a friend!" she said. "Then I'm sorry, Miss Sedgeway. You'll have to adhere to official visiting hours. Only the immediate family is allowed to come and go as they please. Those are the hospital rules.

[Very long pause]

Rosie, I gave that woman such HELL!! Now listen to me, Nursie, says I. I am Miss Rosa Felicia Belasco's immediate family. You cannot find anybody more immediate than I am. And the next time you tell me to leave, you'd better have the police on hand to carry me away, because I'm staying until I'm damned well ready to go. Rose, I nearly punched her in the face. Took her lights out!...

Well, that's not exactly what happened. *[Pause]* Actually that's not what happened at all. You know me, Rose. I did think all those things. I just never got around to saying any of them. Big bad Virginia. Oh, I think big, don't I? I can talk the talk. But when it comes down to it... I don't know... I

clam up. I get confused. The truth is, I begged her. I said "Please". A lot. She sounded like she was sorry. Ahhh, maybe I should have got down on my knees. Begging some stranger to let me see my girl just a little bit longer. I think she was really sorry. Ah, what the hell. Maybe I should have smashed her face in...

All the times I've talked about smashing people's faces in, and I've never done it. Not once. I'm not even sure that I'd enjoy smashing someone's face in. *[Self-pity]* I'm all bark and no bite. Not too much bark either.

[A flicker of hope.] Of course, I did make them switch you to another room now, didn't I? They wouldn't believe that your old room was colder than the rest of the hospital. Well, I showed them. Oh no? I said to them. Just look at this room. It's a mess. You've got two ceiling tiles missing over there, and a crack between the wall and the window over there. This isn't a room, it's a bloody walk-in freezer, I said. Remember what they said to me?

"Oh no, Miss Sedgeway, You must be mistaken. Every room in the hospital is the same temperature. Those are the hospital rules."

Well, I showed them. I brought my own thermometer *from home*, my own bloody thermometer, to prove to them that your room was colder. And it was, wasn't it, Rosie? Six whole degrees colder. I don't mind confessing, when I shoved that thermometer in the Matron's face and she promised to switch you to a new room right then... that was a great day!...

Actually, I didn't shove it in her face, Rose. I just sort of showed it to her. But I got your room changed, didn't I? I'm good for something after all, aren't I, Rosie? *[Suggestive]* I bet you'd say I was good for a lot of things, wouldn't you?

[She has doubts about this. A pause.]

Maybe you wouldn't. I never could predict you. Sometimes I'd feel so close to you, then, quick as a flash, you'd be a million miles away. It used to make me so worried. *[She takes Rose's hand]* Where are you now, my girl? I wish I knew. I wish the hell I knew.

Rosie, baby, I'm holding your hand right now. Can you feel it? Your hand's so cold, thin. Spindly. Like a skel – no, like a delicate leaf. It used to be a big hand, didn't it, Rosie? Bigger than mine. How many times did we put our hands together to compare them, to see how big yours was compared with mine? Why did we do that? I mean, I can see doing something like that once, out of curiosity. But we must have done it a hundred times. Funny the things people do when they spend their whole lives together. *[Pause]* Comparing hands.

[She places Rosemary's imaginary hand on top of hers.]

Hey, you big lunk. Your fingers are still longer than mine.

[She puts Rosie's hand back where it was, resting on her lap.]

Rosie, do you remember the first time we *held* hands. I'll never forget it. We'd known each other a few months, and I was so confused. I mean, I knew you liked me an awful lot. But did you know what I *was*? Were you one too? Were we just good friends? Were we falling in love? What was going on? Finally I couldn't take it any more. I thought to myself, I've got to do something, even if it means losing her as a friend. *[Very dramatic]* So I took your hand in mine. *[Laughs]* I was so scared that you'd jump up and run out of that movie theatre screaming. But you didn't. You stayed right there in your seat. And later that night you kissed me.

I will never forget that moment. Just being kissed by the girl of my dreams – and stepping back into a pile of dogshit. Of course I thought I'd blown it

completely – well, wouldn't you? I thought, Ginnie, you've really done it this time. How can she possibly go for somebody who's so stupid and clumsy?

But you just laughed. As a matter of fact you laughed a lot. Come to think of it, you couldn't stop laughing. You're always laughing at me, aren't you, Rosie? You don't take me seriously at all. And here I thought I'd found me a wife who would make me a nice little girl. Someone I could talk to without fear of contradiction. Was I wrong! Some nice little wife you made me....

Hey Rosie, did I tell you that everybody at work asks about you? Now that's nice. Makes me feel good. Almost like a normal human being instead of some crazy old dyke.

Except Arthur. Now Arthur, he makes a big point of *not* asking about you. But then, he's always hated queers, hasn't he? He's the only one left. All the others have come round. You know, the post office isn't such a bad place to work nowadays. Maybe all that gay liberation stuff has done some good.

Now I don't say for sure. I said *maybe*. And don't you start in about that gay pride parade again. You could have marched in that damned thing all by yourself if you had wanted to. Gay pride, gay pride. I'm gay, dammit. Isn't that enough? Why the hell do I have to be proud of it too? How can you be proud of something you just *are*? That's like being proud that I have blue eyes. Where's the sense in that, I ask you? Well, I'm gay and I have blue eyes. Those are the facts, but I fail to see why I should paint a great big sign and march up and down the street advertising it!

Besides, you can never tell who's going to see you at one of those things. They've got TV crews there and everything! Why, suppose I had marched and I was on television and my Aunt Ida in Fort Wayne, Indiana, sees my

face on the seven-o'clock news and has a heart attack when she finds out her favourite neice is hoh-moh-sexual?

[Pause. She looks at herself.]

Aah, who am I kidding? Everybody knows I'm a hoh-moh-sexual... Even my Aunt Ida in Fort Wayne. *[Pause]* I'm afraid to march in that parade, and that's the truth. Big bad Virginia. Hell, I'm going to do it next year. Yes I am...

Oh, I almost forgot. I brought your mail.

[Takes a bunch of letters from her back pocket]

A whole shitload of letters from the Gay Task Force and all those other do-good organisations you send money to.

[She looks through the letters.]

Friends of 'this', and people trying to stop 'that'. You know, Rosie, you must send a fiver to every good cause on earth. Which is a lot of fivers. *[Pause]* Come to think of it, considering how many groups are out there doing good, I wonder why the world hasn't been saved yet. Probably because *I* haven't sent in *my* money. Oh yes, they're all waiting for a fiver from Virginia Sedgeway to push them over the finishing line.

[She catches Rose's face out of the corner of her eye, rushes to the head of the bed.]

Did you smile? Did I see a smile? I swear I saw you smile, Rose. I think you smiled. *[Grabs Rose's hand]* Darling, are you there? Can you feel me?

[She sits down, rubs her eyes.]

I'm losin' it, Rosie. I'm imagining things.

All right. Time to stop mucking about and get out the big guns.

[She pulls out a package from the butcher's out of the shopping bag.]

Now Rose, up till now, I've been going easy on you, just letting you lie there and pretend you don't see or hear anything. But this nonsense has got to stop. You know what we called your kind in the army? A malingerer. That's what you are, Rosie. You're malingering. You just don't want to get out of bed and do your share of the bloody housework, do you? Well, slugabed, I've got something here that'll put an end to your lazy tricks. Sweetheart, if anything can snap you out of your coma, this is *it*.

[She pulls some strange looking sausages out and sticks them under Rose's nose.]

Italian sausages! Your favourite! Goddammit, Rose, do something! Isn't there something way down inside you that wants to grab these smelly old things and sink your teeth deep into them. *[Pause]* I suppose not. You don't care about food any more, do you, Rose? I never thought I'd see that day.

[She collapses into the chair]

Somehow I got it into my head that smelling Italian sausages would snap you out of your coma. You're laughing at me now, aren't you, my girl? It's all right. I deserve it. You're married to a fool, there's no doubt about it.

Maybe the doctor's right after all. I just talked to him. He told me there was... no hope. Not a hope in hell. I said, doctor, what about a miracle. He said it was too late for a miracle. Too late? Too late? says I. If it wasn't too late it wouldn't be a miracle. A miracle can happen whenever it feels like it.

That's what makes it a miracle. He just said, 'There is no hope', and walked away.

[She focuses intently on Rose.]

Rose, is the doctor right? *[Pause]* I don't know what I expect you to do. Pop out of your coma, and admit it brightly? "Yes, Virginia, the doctor's right. I'm as good as gone." *[She laughs softly]* That would be nice, wouldn't it?

Rose, what is going on? Are you here any more at all? Do you want to be here? You see, I've got to know, because the doctor says that... maybe it's time to... the best thing now is to turn off that respirator that's keeping you breathing. *[Pause]* Is that what you want, darling? Oh my dear baby, I try to *feel* what's going on inside you. I try to... Help me, Rose. Can you hear me? Can you blink your eyelids, wiggle your fingers, anything – *[Loud]* Rose, what do you want? Oh, why didn't we talk about this? Why did we just pretend you were going to get better? *[Takes Rose's hand]* I'm going to sit here and be very, very quiet, and you're going to tell me, do you want to stay or do you want to go?

[There is a long pause. VIRGINIA stands, very angry]

For God's sake, won't that bloody respirator shut up for just a second? I can't hear myself think for that howling. I can't hear *you* think. What am I supposed to do, Rose? You know how I hate to make decisions. It's your life anyhow. It's not fair. Oh, God, I can just hear you now. "Life's not meant to be fair, but it is meant to be fun." I can't count the times I've heard you say that when some shit hits the fan. "Life's not fair but it's fun." Oh, you drove me crazy with your cheerfulness. *[Softly]* Well, it's not much fun now, I can tell you that. Rosie.

[VIRGINIA sits again, head in hands.]

I suppose I should do for you what I'd want you to do for me. *[Pause]* And I know for a stone cold certainty, I'd want you to pull the plug.

[She takes ROSE's hand]

That's it, isn't it, Rose? That's it – am I right? Well, if you want that, dearest... you shall have it. *[Pause]* Oh God, Rosie. Oh god, oh god, oh god.

I'd want the same thing if I was in your shoes, that's for sure. Let me tell you, as soon as this mess is over, I'm going to find a solicitor and put it down in writing that I don't want to be hooked up to any bloody machine when it's time to go. I don't want to go to hospital at all. No, I want to be on a beach on a Greek island – or in the back garden, under the plum tree! Yes, that's where I want to be. I don't care if it's raining and freezing and hailstones the size of tennis balls are coming down. I'll put that in writing so there'll be no doubt about it. Because I know I don't want to be here. *[She looks around her]* I don't want to be here ever again. You know, Rosie, I've never hated anything so much in my life as I've hated this hospital. I hate it.

Now I've got to go and do something to get this sodding machine turned off. The Doctor says he needs permission from somebody in your immediate family, so he can do it. So now I have to talk to your relatives. *[Ironic]* That'll be fun. What a shower, what a bunch of arseholes! Still, it's got to be done. Who's the nicest one, do you think, Rose? Your sister, Anna? Anna... it won't be any trouble for her, she just has to sign a paper. I'll drive down and take it to her.

I'll take care of you, baby. Like I promised. I know you're suffering. It'll be a big relief, won't it? For me too, Rosie, for me too.

[She slumps in the chair.]

You've been dying for such a long time. I've had it, honey.

I don't sleep too well. I wake up, I don't know how many times during the night, and I wonder – has it happened? Is it now?

[She leans intently towards Rose.]

I would have thought, after all we've been – even if I'm not with you, I should *know* when you –

It'll be a whole different world when Rosa Felicia Belasco isn't part of it any more. Maybe the air'll turn purple, the wind will start to howl... earthquakes, volcanoes... *something*. I don't know. It bothers me that it could happen, and I wouldn't know until someone called me from the hospital and told me. Hell, I don't even know if they *would* call me. That's why I have to *be* here. I want to go with you as far as I can go. You were always dragging me to places I'd never heard of and couldn't give a shit about. Maybe if I was here when it happened... I don't know... I would see a puff of smoke rising up from your body, or feel an invisible butterfly touch my face... *something*. I suppose I want to catch your soul. *[Pause]*

Rose, I had a dream last night that we both came back to life as eagles. Bald eagles. You know, when an eagle falls in love, it's for ever. Even if one of them dies, the other one that's left stays on alone. Or maybe it can't be arsed to get used to another eagle. It was such a beautiful dream, sweetheart. We were flying and soaring and playing. A nice life. No post office, no mortgage payments, no washing up. Just trees and sky and you and me. I woke up feeling *wonderful*.

[Pause, then excitedly -]

Rose, maybe that's it/ That's where this whole thing is leading. We'll be eagles together some day. What do you think of that, baby? Do you think it's possible? It sounds like fun, doesn't it?

[She looks at her watch.] Oh shit, it's quarter to seven. Fuck it, I don't *feel* like leaving. I'm just going to sit here and refuse to move. *[She folds her arms resolutely]* Let them call the police.

[There's a long silence as VIRGINIA waits for the nurse to arrive. She feels less and less certain of her defiance as the seconds pass.]

Wait, I've got a better idea. I'll hide behind your bed. That nurse usually just sticks her head round the door then goes on down the corridor. Now don't you make a sound... It would be just like you to come out of your coma at this very moment so you could give me away and embarrass me.

[She starts to go behind the bed, then stops.]

Hey, do you know what this reminds me of? Remember when we went to visit your old college friend Adèle and she put us in separate bedrooms? And I sneaked down the hall in the middle of the night into your room. And we were having such a good time together... you know... messing around. And then Adèle has to come knocking on the door because she wants to come in and have a little midnight chat with her old college chum. So I hid in the cupboard. The only trouble was, I couldn't stop giggling. And you're spluttering and coughing like you've got consumption, to cover the sound of me giggling. But Adèle heard me anyhow, because she threw open the cupboard door, and I was standing there stark naked. I stopped giggling then all right, didn't I? Cos Adèle screamed and tore out of the room. We had to pack our bags and skedaddle in the middle of the night. I always the closet...

Uh-oh. Here comes the nurse now.

[She ducks down behind the bed. Pause. Then she looks up at the imaginary nurse who has discovered her.]

Oh, hello, nurse.

[She stands up.]

No, no I'm fine. I... I... I just dropped something. Yes! I think it probably rolled under the.

[Pretends to look under the bed, then glances at the nightstand.]

Oh, there they are! The Italian sausages! On the nightstand the whole time! Would you believe it? *[Pause]* Are visiting hours over?

[She looks at her watch in disbelief] Goodness me! How time flies when you're having fun, doesn't it? *[To ROSE]* Well my dear, it's time to go. Yes indeed, time to go.

[She slowly gathers her things together. Speaks to ROSE, but obviously aware of the Nurse's presence.]

I love you. Never forget that. And remember, you're my girl. I'll take care of everything. Don't you worry, Rosie. I'll make everything all right. *[She turns to the Nurse.]* Goodnight, nurse.

[VIRGINIA exits slowly, head held high. The lights fade to black. The sound of the respirator continues.]

Scene Two

[As the lights fade up, the sound of the respirator continues. VIRGINIA enters, looking exhausted and depressed.]

Hello there, Rosie. How's my darling?

[She turns away from ROSE]

You know what I did when I left here last night? I got out the car and drove. I drove and drove and drove. All over the city. I couldn't face the thought of going home alone... again. That's not the first time I've done that either, I can tell you. I'm wasting an awful lot of money on petrol. And I can't afford it!

Do you know what I did when I got home? I contacted your relatives. Rose, I know you don't want to hear all the gory details, after all you've been dealing with that shower all your life. So I'll just give you the short version. Your sister Anna wouldn't speak to me. Your brother Gino told me it was God's will that you were on a respirator and, being a good Christian, he didn't want to interfere. Your father's in care home and not doing too well himself. And that was it for your immediate family.

I just spoke to the doctor, and he says that there's nothing he can do if they don't want to get involved. He says we'll have to 'let nature take its course'. I'm sorry, darling. I tell you, Rosie, between God's will, the hospital's will, the doctors' will and the relatives' will, there's not much will left over for us, is there?

[She walks over to the respirator]

It feels like this machine has more say over the situation than we have.

"Let Nature take its course." Let nature take its course. *[Furious]* What the fuck has this machine that does your breathing for you have to with Nature? Hell, if you were out in Nature, some wild animal would come along and *kill* you. Nature wouldn't allow you to suffer like this. *[She stares at the respirator]* Machines. I hate machines. They pretend to be your friend, but they'll stab you in the back when they get the chance. *[Bitterly]* Machines!

And doctors! That's another really disappointing subject, isn't it, Rose? Can you imagine? I used to think that they knew everything. I thought they were special. Not gods, exactly, but somewhere between being human and being a god, But know what, Rosie? They're just stumbling around in the dark like all the rest of us. Isn't that sad? I wish they were gods. *[Pause]* Your doctor – well he's not the worst. He didn't give you cancer, after all. I have to keep reminding myself of that. I just wish he cared a little more. But he's so busy, he doesn't have the time. Besides, I'm sure it would make him so sad if he did care. If he understood that you, Rosie Belasco, were dying. Not just anyone, but you.

You know, Rose, I think my death will be a hell of a lot easier for me than yours. For one thing, after yours, I'll have had a lot of practice. For another, I won't worry about being lonely. I don't think people worry about being lonely when they're dying, do you, Rosie? So in a lot of ways, what is happening right now is the worst thing that could happen to me.

You know, Rosie, when we fell in love it was all very nice and beautiful. And now it's come to this, I wonder if I would have had the courage to fall in love with you if I'd known how it was going to end. This love business is a bit tricky, isn't it? Sets you up riding for a big fall. It hurts much too much.

[She turns on ROSE]

Rose, why did you have to go and get sick? Nowadays they're saying that when you get cancer it's your own damned fault, that you brought it on yourself somehow by not looking after yourself, or worrying too much. And why didn't you go to the doctor when you first noticed the blood? *[Sarcastic]* Oh, no. Rosie doesn't believe in doctors. So Rosie waits for six months before she even says a word to me. And then I had to drag you to the doctor's. *[She spits the words out.]* That was just plain stupid, you silly woman. STUPID. Maybe they could have saved you. And all that money we threw away on magic potions and miracle cures, those herbs and megavitamins, that laetrile. And the hot baths and the cold baths and rubbing your body with a natural bristle brush and giving you coffee enemas. And all the time I took off work to cart you to this doctor and that doctor, or just to be with you when you were scared. And then, to top it all off, towards the end you turn nasty on me and you insult me when I visit. I've done everything I can for you. *[Out of control]* Goddamit, woman, I'm sick of it. I'm sick of coming here and sitting with you. I'm sick of talking to that doctor. I'm sick of thinking about you all the time. I'm sick and tired and broke and fed up. I wish you'd die, woman, and set me free.

[Pause. She can't believe she's said that. The words tumble out.]

I'm sorry, Rose, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I never even thought it. I'm sorry, I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

[Pause. Defeated.] I'm sorry for so many things. For not keeping the house clean. For not going on Gay Pride with you. I'm sorry for all the times I got drunk and embarrassed you in public. *[Pause]* Maybe I should have borrowed more money and gone private. I could have taken you to another doctor, a better doctor. Maybe I should have tried to move you to a better hospital. What do you think, Rosie? What do you think?

You know what I regret the most? That I never told you that I forgave you for having that... affair with Sandy all those years ago. Every day I've been coming here, and I've been saying to myself, "Tell her you forgive her, you idiot. Tell her."

But... I don't know... you'd be in a bad mood, or in pain, or I was tired... it never seemed the right time. And then one day I turned up, and you couldn't hear me any more. *[Pause]* Well, I might as well say it right now. I forgive you, Rosie. It doesn't matter. Out of twenty-seven good years, what difference do a few bad months make? Can you hear me, Rosie? It doesn't matter any more. It hasn't for a long time.

[She notices old flowers in the pitcher.]

Damn. I forgot the flowers today. I'm losing it, Rosie.

[VIRGINIA is spent, calm]

You know, last night, when I couldn't sleep, this song kept going through my head. I learnt it when I was a little girl in Sunday School. *[Sings]* "Death is a long, long sleep, Sleep is a short, short death that softens but never ends life's grief. Death is a long, long sleep." What kind of song is that to teach small children, eh? I loved it though. It's a round. You know, one person starts singing and then another person comes in in the middle of the song, and then another, and then another. I used to love singing rounds when I was a little girl.

[She looks at her watch] Well, dearest, visiting hours aren't over yet. But I'm completely wiped out. I think I'll go. But I'll be back tomorrow, don't you worry. Same time, same channel. *[She stands up, stretches]* One last kiss before I go.

[She bends down to kiss Rose, then jumps up, turns around walks to the door and looks out in the hall. Turns around. Stops.]

Good grief, look what they've done to me, Rose. Here we are in the hospital, I might never see you again, and I'm still afraid someone might see me kissing you on the lips. What do you make of that? I've spent so many years hiding and pretending, that it doesn't matter any more if there's someone actually watching. Because there's always somebody watching... inside me. I feel like I've been walking around all my life with a great rock on my chest.

And now they tell me that after living with you for twenty-seven years, and coming to visit you in this awful hospital every single day, that I'm nobody to you? That I've got no rights? *[Angry, crying]* Oh, if I was some man who met you and married you two months ago, that would be different. A man would have the right to say, "This person can't speak for herself any more, but I love her and I believe she wants to die." Oh, they would listen to a man, wouldn't they? But me, I'm just queer old Virginia, so I don't count. They can tell me when I have to get out of this room. "Those are the rules."

Those are the rules! THOSE ARE THE RULES! *[Pause]* Well, who the hell made those rules? They've got no right to make rules that come between you and me, sweetheart.

Rose, I want to hold you so close right now. I want to press you, squeeze you to me so hard. I want to wrap myself around you. But I can't because got all those damn tubes running in and out of you. Damn them. Damn them all with their tubes and rules and papers and machines.

Oh Rosie, do you want me to turn that respirator off right now? With my own hands? I could... I know which dial it is... I've seen the nurses fiddling with it. I could walk over there, put my hand on that big blue dial and...

I'm scared, Rose. What if I get caught?

[She looks at her watch]

I've got time.

Darling, I know you're suffering. I can feel it. But what am I going to do without you? At least now I can come here and sit and talk, it's better than nothing. When you're gone, people will think I'm crazy to talk to you. Now they just think I'm a fool. Or maybe it's some kind of therapy.

I know I said I wished you'd die, but I'm afraid to live without you, I'm afraid, baby.

You want me to turn it off, don't you baby? Rose, I love you too much to do it. And I love you too much not to do it. Damn this world. Making us suffer just because we love each other.

Rose, I love you so much. You have blessed my life. Nobody's luckier than me. Nobody. You are my sweet baby, my angel, my lover... My wife. You are my wife. You and I know that. And I've got a right to turn that respirator off. I've got a RIGHT. Don't I, Rose?

[She walks to the door, looks out into the hospital corridor, softly closes the door. Turns to face Rose.]

You're my angel, Rose. My girl. Always were and always will be.

[She walks over to the respirator. Slowly reaches for the dial and turns it off. As she turns it, the sound of the respirator fades away. VIRGINIA sits down and takes Rose's hand.]

Don't forget about being eagles now. You wait for me, Rosie. I'll be there, and we'll be flying. You'll see.

The lights fade slowly to

BLACKOUT