

SCENE 1

RUTH

What are you talking about?

CLARA

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

JIMMY

Boring them?

CLARA

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

(A dreary monotone.)

"This is a statue of the Blessed Mother, built by my grandfather in 1943. He was a kindly old barber." ...Sheesh! Did they stay and listen? They left skid marks they drove off so fast.

(To Ruth.)

You, you're no better. Sounds like you're sellin' insurance out there.

(Another dreary delivery.)

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

(To Jimmy.)

You start.

JIMMY

I ain't startin'.

CLARA

(To Ruth.)

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

You care so much about the statue.

RUTH

Yes, I care.

CLARA

Well?

RUTH

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

CLARA

(To Jimmy.)

Alright, you, let's hear it.

JIMMY

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

CLARA

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

JIMMY

(With a long sigh of resignation, he begins, with a rather uninspired delivery.)

This is a statue of the Blessed --

CLARA

Stand up.

JIMMY

Awww--

CLARA

Up! Get in the spirit of it.

(He stands.)

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

JIMMY

(Rolls his eyes and begins.)

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

(Off her blank stare.)

You don't like it.

CLARA

If I was an insomniac I'd love it.

JIMMY

What's the matter with it?

CLARA

It's got no pizzazz.

JIMMY

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

CLARA

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

JIMMY

Every Sunday from twelve to five-thirty.

(Now an overdone attempt at acting.)

And the reason...

(Already he hates it. But he tries again.)

And the reason the statue is here is because on one Christmas Eve, at midnight, the Blessed Mother herself appeared to my grandfather. Right in his shop. And she --

CLARA

(With theatrical gestures.)

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

JIMMY

C'mon, I can't do that!

RUTH

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

CLARA

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

JIMMY

She appeared right in his shop.

(Continues with an awkward attempt at theatrics.)

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

CLARA

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

SCENE 2

CLARA

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

RUTH

How much is in that bank account now?

CLARA

None of your business.

JIMMY

I could use some new snow tires.

CLARA

Keep dreamin'.

RUTH

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

CLARA

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

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

RUTH

So what are you going to do with it?

CLARA

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

JIMMY

Alright, alright.

CLARA

Buy your own snow tires.

JIMMY

Alright.

CLARA

(Looks at clock.)
Where is that girl?

RUTH

I know, "Waiting for Godot" was easier.

Who? CLARA

It's a play. RUTH

JIMMY

Hey, didn't you audition for a play last week? How'd that go?

Didn't get the part. RUTH

Hmm. Just as well. CLARA

What does that mean? RUTH

CLARA

Well, a dirty show like that.

JIMMY

Dirty?

It's not dirty. RUTH

CLARA

It's not dirty?

RUTH

No, it's not.

CLARA

With a name like that?

JIMMY

What's it called?

CLARA

Not in this house, Mister.

JIMMY

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

CLARA

No, no.

(To Ruth.)

Look, Missy, I been around the block. You think we didn't have dirty shows in my day? Downtown at the Palace Burlesque, you bet we had 'em. So don't tell me.

RUTH

Ma--

CLARA

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

(Covers her ears.)

Naaaaaah--!

RUTH

For God's sake.

JIMMY

Ha-ha-ha --

CLARA

(To Jimmy.)

Stop that!

(To Ruth.)

CLARA (CONT.)

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

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

SCENE 3

Finally!!

RUTH

(Wiping her feet.)

BEVERLY

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

RUTH

You what?

CLARA

Beverly, listen, I wanna ask you somethin'.

BEVERLY

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

CLARA

I know but this new boyfriend of yours...

JIMMY

Yeah, what happened there?

CLARA

I wanna know, does he got connections?

BEVERLY

Connections?

JIMMY

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

BEVERLY

None o' your bees wax.

CLARA

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

BEVERLY

That is not what happened.

RUTH

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

JIMMY

(To Beverly.)

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

BEVERLY

The day I take romantic advice from you!

RUTH

You've got people waiting for you?

JIMMY

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

BEVERLY

Can it, garbage man.

CLARA

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

BEVERLY

Almost priest, Ma. Gerard was an almost priest.

CLARA

Almost?

BEVERLY

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

(Off Clara's puzzled look.)

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

CLARA

Catholic Singles--?

JIMMY

You met him on-line?

BEVERLY

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

CLARA

Grandkids!

BEVERLY

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

RUTH

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

BEVERLY

(Overlapping.)

Oh, and Ma, I told him about Grampa's miracle. He went nuts.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

He's dying to see the statue. Dyin' to see "Clara's Soup Kitchen" and try your miracle soup. And he says --get this-- he says instead of givin' it away to your homeless, you could be sellin' this stuff.

CLARA

Sell it, naah --

BEVERLY

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

(Sees soup kettle on stove.)

Is this for tomorrow? What kind?

CLARA

Ox-tail.

BEVERLY

(Sniffs soup.)

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

JIMMY

(Putting vacuum cleaner away.)

All fixed.

CLARA

Thank you, boy genius.

BEVERLY

(Snapping fingers at Ruth.)

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

RUTH

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

BEVERLY

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

RUTH

No!

BEVERLY

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

RUTH

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

JIMMY

A tournament tonight? Are you serious?

SCENE 4

RUTH

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

CLARA

A baby?

RUTH

Grandma thought, "Who's this stranger with a baby? We're trying to pack!" Then what does this strange woman do, she begs them to take the baby with them to America. Grandma says, "You must be outa your mind, go away!" But Isabelle said they must do it -- because the baby was her's... and Grandpa's.

(Clara is stunned.)

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

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

RUTH (CONT'D)

Ma...

BEVERLY

Get out. Go home.

JIMMY

Bev!

BEVERLY

Or here.

(Takes cheese knife.)

Do it quick. Just take this and stab her!

RUTH

Beverly--!

BEVERLY

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

RUTH

Ma --

BEVERLY

Leave her alone!

CLARA

(Through her sobs.)

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

RUTH

Ma, I'm sorry. Really. But I had to tell you. And not just so I can go and do this show, no. Because I think it's better that you know. I've wanted to tell you since Grandma died.

BEVERLY

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

RUTH

No, of course not.

BEVERLY

Well?

RUTH

'Cause I like my mother.

BEVERLY

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

JIMMY

Leave me out.

BEVERLY

What do you believe in, anyway?

JIMMY

In gettin' along.

RUTH

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

BEVERLY

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

(Quietly.)
Ruth --

RUTH

Ma?

CLARA

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

RUTH

Oh, Ma -- !

CLARA

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

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

RUTH

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

BEVERLY

Beautiful? How do you get beautiful out of that?

SCENE 5

RUTH

Now that the miracle's over.

CLARA

Well, we had a meeting about that last night while you were packin'. Me, Jimmy and Bev. Bev says, first of all, I should come up with a new speech. Think so?

(Ruth shrugs "maybe.")

This statue was built by my father in 1943. And it stands here to honor one of the unsung heroes of World War Two.

(She looks to Ruth for approval.)

Ruth nods encouragement.)

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

RUTH

...Like Grandma?

CLARA

Like Grandma.

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

CLARA (CONT'D)

The girl can't wait to get back.

RUTH

I'll tell her to hold her horses.

(Finishes text, shuts phone.)

Ma, you don't really dislike Lucy, do you? Just 'cause she moved away?

CLARA

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

RUTH

(Stares at Clara -- wondering!)

...Ma?

CLARA

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

Hey, I know the score, I got cable.

RUTH

Oh, Christ...

(Overcome, the tears start. She quickly digs
for a tissue in her pocket.)

Have you always known? Why didn't you ever say anything?

CLARA

Why didn't you?

RUTH

I thought you'd be upset.

CLARA

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

RUTH

And...the Church? What about them?

CLARA

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

RUTH

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

CLARA

(Busies herself.)

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

RUTH

Right.

CLARA

Only don't do no dirty shows!

RUTH

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

CLARA

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

RUTH

(Gathering final things.)

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

CLARA

Oh, yeah, well, we were thinkin' we might buy Kozlowski's
bakery. I could make my *Kisiel*, my *Kolaczki*, all that.

(MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)

Keep the free soup goin'. Put the statue in the window.
Call the place "Isabelle's."

RUTH

Buy it?

CLARA

Yeah.

RUTH

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

CLARA

The savings account.

RUTH

The savings account? Whattaya mean? Those coins?

(Clara just smiles.)

But how much could that be? Those were little dimes and quarters and...

CLARA

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

RUTH

(Her wheels turn.)

Sixty-five...

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

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

RUTH (CONT'D)

Mama!!

CLARA

So, the miracle's over, huh?

RUTH

(Re: the check.)

Oh, Mama -- ! This is --

CLARA

It's a little leftover change.

RUTH

But-- but --

CLARA

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

RUTH

I will.

CLARA

I got Jimmy some snow tires, too.

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

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

RUTH

Yes, ma'm.

CLARA

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

RUTH

Right.

CLARA

You and Lucy both.

RUTH

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