

Home for the Holocaust

a play in ten scenes

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARIE, suburban mother, late 60s

STAN, **MARIE'S** next door neighbor, Jewish man in early 70s (also

BARTENDER/HAZMAT WORKER)

TIM, **MARIE'S** son, late 30s

MILO, **MARIE'S** son, early 40s

a **G-MAN**

a **G-LADY**

Scene 1.

MUSICAL PRELUDE

[Before curtain opens or full lights up, we see, in front of the curtain or stage, the G-Lady singing the bridge from “Manic Monday.”]

G-LADY: Out of my life
 Why did my lover have to go
 Out of my life?

[Slowly some light up behind her, and we see **MARIE** on one side of the set with a rosary wrapped around her hands making a sign of the cross, then putting her goggles on and trudging into the fallout shelter in the yard. On the other side of the stage, we see **STAN** miming coughing hard into a handkerchief, and then examining the inside of the handkerchief carefully and ruefully. All three exit: lights up on

the single set, including a bit of yard with some old dead tree showing, a gnarled witchy looking tree with a chaise lounge chair beneath it, a porch/kitchen area, where there are stacks of magazines and a little home-made fallout-shelter door in back: we are outside and inside **MARIE'S** suburban home. In the yard, there is an intricate set-up of birdhouses, with glass tubes like HabiTrail sections coming out the bottoms of them: the whole bird-house system looks crudely wired in some way, too.

At the front of the stage is a mailbox on a pole. At the back of the stage is an enormous blue recycling bin on wheels. **MARIE** comes out the front door with a broom in her hand and carrying a small paper bag. She is wearing chemist goggles on an elastic cord around her neck. She uses the broom to smack the overhead porch light. A tinkling noise is heard. She set the paper bag on top of it and begins dragging the blue bin toward the curb downstage.]

MARIE: My good deed of the day. Taking care of the earth. Recycling. I'm giving back. *Paying it forward. Love yourself so much neighbor as you love yourself?* (she spits carelessly) There's some more I'm giving back. Me to you, earth. Mother Earth, meet Mother Marie. We square off again. Help me, Mother Mary of God.

(pause. She pulls the bin around to the shelter and opens the door – a weak purple light cuts on, humming, from inside. MARIE sticks her hand in and removes some plastic wrap – feathers fly out and around her – and she bundles the plastic wrap and stuffs it into the recycling bin. She resumes slowly pulling the bin downstage.)

Remember the day you were born? Of course not. Who does? We were all squinting and covered with cheese. But the day you were born, you were just as close to being a happy person as you are now. Think about it.

(pause)

(She pulls her recycling bin forward a little bit) This is as big as I am, for heaven's sake. There's five days of newspapers, an empty milk quart, and two diet coke cans. What do I live on – dust and air? It's the bin that should be recycled!

(pause. she takes the paper bag and hold it in her hand, considering it, then looks into the trees.)

Look at the birds flying! Wildlife. Feathers, beaks, eggs with shell. They live and fly and don't ask why, poor things. (she opens the paper bag and tosses out several dead birds onto the stage, then walks over and "checks" the bird-houses.) So sad that we use them so badly. (she pulls the bin forward a bit)

(pause) (she stops pulling it and leans against it.) Still, there's a nice heft this thing. Like a big solid man. Not that I would know what that feels like.

(she laughs, then stops short, leaves the bin and walk up to the tree behind her.) What are you looking at? This is what we do, the living. The world didn't stop just because your heart did. (she spits at the base of the tree) There, more giving back.

I should be kinder to you – or to your memory, at least. Never thought it would happen. Me, coming around to your way of thinking! Mr. Gloomy Gus! Mr. Nathan Negative! Mr. Milo Merton, Misanthrope! And me—Suzie Sunshine to your morose self. Don't laugh! (shaking her fist at the tree) Don't you laugh at me! You didn't have to live on – you didn't have to watch the world going down the tubes. You checked out early! But I did! I had to stick around and take care of the boys and watch them drift of into this pale place, this weird world! No more – not me – I stay inside now. I'm holding out in privacy for my own redemption.

That's what men do: Men leave. Men die. Men make a mess. Mary wasn't just the mother of God – she was the MOTHER OF ALL GODS. She ran the show. Note to self: I am a Marian Catholic. I answer to no man. Mother Mary of God! MMG! MMG!

[She resumes pulling. STAN, MARIE'S next door neighbor, enters jauntily pulling his own recycling bin. He stops when he sees MARIE, though, and watches her, bemused.]

I'm halfway there. (she pulls the bin a bit and stops.) Oh, my arm is killing me! (she rubs her right arm) Where is Tim? He said he would drop by this morning and do this. It's only a little task – I don't call on him night and day – I can't! -- I just ask for a bit of effort now and again.

STAN: I can help you with that, Marie.

MARIE: (surprised) Argh! You gave me a fright, Stan!

STAN: I'm sorry—

MARIE: Don't sneak up on me like that!

STAN: Well, Marie, I do LIVE here—

MARIE: (blustering) Must you skulk around and surprise a person like that? With your big cheery voice!

STAN: Can't help it. It's another good day.

MARIE: (agitated) You big cheery—

STAN: (helpful) Go ahead and say it.

MARIE: I don't wanna!

STAN: Go on.

MARIE: It's like cursing!

STAN: Of course it isn't – that's what I'm trying to cure you of. It's NOT a curse. say it.

MARIE: You – big – cheery –

STAN: (coaxing) Thatta girl.

MARIE: (exploding) – Jewey Jew Jew!
(pause)

STAN: Feel better?

MARIE: I'm sorry, Stan.

STAN: Not a problem.

MARIE: It's just –

STAN: I know. You've just got to say it.

MARIE: I can't control—

STAN: Because that's how you were brought up, right?

MARIE: We're brought up to –

STAN: -- be on the look-out for the Jew at all times.

MARIE: You don't understand—

STAN: No, I do.

MARIE: You do?

STAN: Of course I do. We were brought up to be on the lookout for people on the lookout for people like us.

MARIE: Like who?

STAN: Everybody! Ah, the fame of the Jew! What a life! Any Jew is every Jew. You don't know what it's like – to have to satisfy every stereotype. Oh, I forgot my wallet! No bacon today, thanks! It was *so* nice to nail Christ to the cross. Want me to take your temperature? Perhaps you'd like me to sue someone for you? Or you'll want to meet my wife, also my cousin?
(pause)

MARIE: Sometimes I don't follow you.

STAN: You're prejudiced against Jews, Marie.

MARIE: I'm not. The older I get, in fact, the more I care for you Old Testament, rather than our New.

STAN: How's that?

MARIE: Your Old Testament had some rules, at least. Not all this bonding and forgiveness. Taking it on oneself.

STAN: I don't—

MARIE: I miss the smiting! The awe! The vengeance of Mary Mother of God!

STAN: (shaking his head) I don't remember much about the Virgin Mary in the Old Testament.

MARIE: (ignoring him) I wish I could bring some of that back. Punishment and reward. Good and bad. You're in or you're out.

(pause)

MARIE: And speaking of prejudice – it's the same for Catholics.

STAN: Nope. First of all, there's more of you. Secondly...

MARIE: Do we have to fight about religion?

(pause)

It's like being married.

(pause)

STAN: (brightening) Would you marry a Jew, Marie?

MARIE: (shocked) Of course not! I can't!

STAN: You *could*...

MARIE: It's against my religion.

STAN: It's not. I'm not asking you to convert—

MARIE: I was only taking the recycling to the curb!

(pause)

Still, as sins go, inter-marriage can't be a very grievous one.

STAN: It's your pick and choose Catholicism again!

MARIE: (sniffing) So I've changed some of the rules around, here and there.

STAN: A belief buffet! (solicitously) How's the arm, Marie?

MARIE: (angrily) So you were eavesdropping, too!

(pause)

STAN: Do you mean, you were eavesdropping, Jewey Jew-Jew?

(pause)

I overheard you were talking to yourself. I have to take *my* recycling to the curb, too, you know.

MARIE: Can't I talk to myself? Haven't I the right?

STAN: Of course, but –

MARIE: A woman living alone—

STAN: I wasn't doing it on purpose—

MARIE: I'm sure your wife never appreciated you sneaking up on her.

STAN: (affably) She wasn't too concerned about it.

(pause. Stan notices the birds on the stage.)

More dead birds. You must have some kind of rogue cat living in your yard, Marie.

MARIE: (vaguely) Maybe that's what I am.

STAN: (looking close) They don't look torn up, though.

MARIE: I'll just gather them and bury them in back.

STAN: Can I help you?

MARIE: No! I can do it.

STAN: (looking at bird-houses) What are you feeding them, anyway?

MARIE: Just seed. Just the store-stuff.

STAN: Saint Marie of Assisi!

MARIE: (sharply) Don't mock me. (pause) (looking at Stan, diverting him a bit) You look thin.

STAN: (sticking his thumb inside his waistband) Maybe a little.

MARIE: Definitely. Are you not eating?

STAN: (scratching his head) Pretty much as usual.

MARIE: It's not good – losing weight at your age.

STAN: No.

MARIE: It's just not good at all.
(pause)

STAN: Where's Tim?

MARIE: He's supposed to come by– he's probably forgotten.

STAN: Might be busy.

MARIE: (irritated) He's always busy. What if I had been too busy to give birth to him?

STAN: Well, it's an election year for him.

MARIE: (absently) I suppose.

STAN: He's supposed to give his announcement speech this week. He's running pro-development again, I think.

(there is the sound of machinery from off stage)

And there's some divine development right there – they're back at it, digging up the street.

MARIE: Nothing wrong with the street to begin with.

STAN: Re-paving –they do it on schedule.

MARIE: The street is fine by me. I've no complaints about it.

STAN: That's your tax money, then – all the improvements you never needed. I wonder if we get better treatment on our streets because of Tim. (he looks offstage) Look, they're taking down the street sign.

MARIE: (frantic) What?

STAN: (soothingly) Probably another scheduled maintenance.

MARIE: Why are they doing that? Now no one will be able to find me.

STAN: Maybe they'll fix the typo.

MARIE: Typo?

STAN: Haven't you ever noticed? There's an "S" at the end of the street name.

MARIE: (vaguely) I've never really looked at it, I guess.

STAN: (dragging his bin down to the curb) How about a cup of coffee?

MARIE: No, I've got errands.

STAN: (offering) Can I please take that down to the curb for you?

MARIE: No, thank you. I'm not completely helpless.

STAN: Of course you're not. Still, you should let me help you out from time to time.

MARIE: I can take of myself.

STAN: As you've proven. But if someone else wants to take of you –

MARIE: (primly) I don't even know what you're driving out.

STAN: – if it made some else happy to help you –

MARIE: Now I'm in charge of making *you* happy?

STAN: – you should consider saying “yes” sometime. Might make it a little easier for you. A little company, a little companionship. Pooling our resources.

MARIE: (softening) Oh Stan, not again.

STAN: Just a thought.

MARIE: MMG –

STAN: Who?

MARIE: Mary Mother of God –

STAN: (smiling) Not her again!

MARIE: (piously) – has seen fit for me to end my days alone.

STAN: Nonsense, Marie. Take it from an old Jew – God – er, MMG doesn't want to see anybody alone.

MARIE: Religious differences aside –

STAN: I could convert!

MARIE: No, you couldn't. (pause, uncontrollably) Jewey Jew-Jew!

STAN: (ignoring her) Well, maybe I couldn't convert to your particular flavor – where God is a woman, and you can't really tell your real sins during confession –

MARIE: I tell my real sins. (pause) Some of them. (pause) The less shameful ones. I mean, I'm not going to sit there and embarrass the poor priest in the booth – hasn't he got enough to do without worrying about me cursing?

STAN: What about baptism?

MARIE: Optional. Look at all those poor starving babies around the world who are never going to get near a cruet of holy oil in their life.

STAN: And there's your rule that no meat on Fridays doesn't mean no meatloaf.

MARIE: Meatloaf is too cheap to be considered real meat!

STAN: Well, you should think about it, Marie – it makes you live longer, having a mate.

MARIE: (frowning) Do you have to use that word?

STAN: What word?

MARIE: Mate.

STAN: What's wrong with it?

MARIE: It's so – fleshy.

STAN: It is?

MARIE: You wouldn't even know, being a man. But don't think I don't know what your idea of marriage is.

STAN: (confused) You do?

MARIE: Men and women get married for different reasons.

STAN: They do?

MARIE: Women want stability and children and soul-talk and nice things.

STAN: And what do men want?
(pause)

MARIE: The other.

STAN: Oh, Marie, stop it—

MARIE: Don't deny it.

STAN: We're neither of us spring chickens and – the other – will be the least of our worries.

(sound of a car horn)

MARIE: Here's the great communicator, late as usual. (she struggles to get the recycling bin to the curb before Tim arrives. Stan attempts to help her, and they make a mess of it. Tim enters, always with a cigar in his pocket or hanging out of his mouth)

TIM: Morning, citizens! How you doing, Stan?

STAN: Howdy, Tim.

MARIE: Better never than late, one might say.

STAN: (affable again) He's good for showing at all!

TIM: (steeling himself) Thanks, Stan. I like to think of myself as – dependable. I serve. I serve all. Not just my mother.

MARIE: Yeah, you're a rock. With your big-shot cigar.

TIM: Now, mother. The public good is your good, too.

STAN: How's the campaign?

TIM: Good, good – I'm optimistic. (brandishes his valise over his head) I've got my announcement speech ready to present at the end of the week.

MARIE: Big speech-maker. Do you mention your mother?

STAN: (ignoring her) Any changes to your platform?

TIM: It's just the Council. I'm trying to be low-key. I'd have to really drop the ball not to get re-elected.

STAN: What's the motto?

TIM: "Development for Everyman."

STAN: I like it.

TIM: (can't help but be pleased) Like I said – I serve all.

MARIE: Your public should see how you load the dishwasher.

TIM: The dishwasher?

MARIE: MY dishwasher.

TIM: Did I miss something?

MARIE: The knives. The forks. The china versus the plastic. You do it wrong.

TIM: That I do it at ALL – a council member, a person who facilitates business development, who keeps the taxes rolling in – should be –

MARIE: Tines DOWN! Blades DOWN! Plastic in front, china in back.

TIM: It's not like—

MARIE: It's not like you've been doing it wrong your whole life?

STAN: (embarrassed) Now, people –

TIM: (keeping calm) I'm the son that shows up. You feel isolated and alone, mother. You should move someplace where you'd have more company.

STAN: She's doing okay, Tim.

MARIE: He'd have me in a nursing home in a shot.

STAN: No need, Marie. You're young at heart.

TIM: A little more structure to your days. A little less empty echoing space. You'd feel – more fulfilled. (looking around) I mean, why can't you throw away a magazine?

STAN: (worried) People...

MARIE: (bristling) I need those magazines.

TIM: (flipping through a stack) New Scientist Magazine, Sensors Magazine, the U.N. Wire, Science Magazine, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists – what are all these?

MARIE: Oh, leave me alone!

TIM: Are these – are these *Dad's* Magazines?

MARIE: Some of them.

TIM: You're still getting them?

MARIE: I read some.

TIM: I've begged you to change the listing!

MARIE: Why bother?

TIM: (shaking his head) All still in Dad's name? The phone, the gas, the papers, the magazines! (flipping through more) Agricultural Digest, Farming Machinery Review, Public Health Magazine – why don't you just cancel them?

MARIE: (sitting, shaking out renewal subscription cards and carefully bundling them, using rubber bands from around her wrist) I don't like throwing them out without reading them! First I have to get all this – NONSENSE – out of them.

TIM: And why are you saving all these plastic liter bottles?

MARIE: For recycling!

TIM: Then put them in your recycling bin!

MARIE: (desperately) They're not for the County recycling!

TIM: Then what are they for?

MARIE: Church recycling! "Plastic for Playgrounds!"
(pause)

TIM: (to Stan) You see what I'm up against here.

STAN: (looking at his watch, back at his house, at his shoes) Maybe I'd better get going...

TIM: There's just me here for you, Mom. And I have my own family.

MARIE: (sniffing) If only Milo—

TIM: He had about enough of us 15 years ago, I guess.

STAN: Tim, you don't have to—

TIM: Milo waltzed off into the ever-loving sunshine! Wonder why?

MARIE: Because an ARTIST follows his own tune!

TIM: Or he was going bananas!

(pause)

An artist? An ARTIST? Do you know something I don't know? That guy – your son – my brother – what has he ever created? Except a lot of confusion and sadness?

(pause)

I'd like to see Milo do what I do – for a day, for an hour, even!

MARIE: What would you know – a politician?

TIM: I know enough.

MARIE: A politician follows everybody's tune! You just stand around all day pleasing people – except your mother.

TIM: Lord. My job, mother, is to make shi - -- make stuff happen.

MARIE: You wake up – gotta give them what they want.

TIM: You're so simplistic.

MARIE: I mean, aren't I in your DISTRICT?

(pause)

(gesturing toward the tree) You're like your father in that way. The one person in the world he didn't want to like him was me.

TIM: I really wish you would get rid of that scuzzy tree.

MARIE: Why?

TIM: It's embarrassing. It doesn't fit. (gesturing) You live on a beautiful street, with beautiful houses and trees.

STAN: And jackhammers.

TIM: (ignoring him) And yet you protect that eyesore of a tree.

MARIE: Your father planted that tree.

TIM: (hopelessly) I know, I know.

MARIE: About the only thing he ever did for this house. Never repainted it –

TIM: I repainted it.

MARIE: (ignoring him) I had to pay someone to repaint it.

TIM: You paid me \$50! It took me seven weeks to paint the whole thing.

MARIE: And yet that tree was something your father did accomplish.

TIM: He stuck a spindly seedling in the ground and ignored it from then on.

MARIE: He watered it –

TIM: I watered it!

MARIE: He pruned it.

TIM: I pruned it! He stubbed his cigarettes out on it and dropped the ashes on the ground by the trunk. “Good for it,” he’d say. “Carbon. Good for the soil.”

STAN: (musing) He’s right about that.

TIM: (running to the tree) But look at the cigarette burns in the trunk! They’ll never go away.

MARIE: And if I want to keep some memory of him around –

TIM: Besides the debts and the emotional damage?

MARIE: –and I’ll be GODDAMNED if my politician son will prevent it.

(shocked silence at her cursing)

STAN: There’s something for your next confession.

MARIE: (sniffing) Profanities are hardly a large enough matter to disturb MMG about.
(pause)

(to Tim) And why are you looking behind me? What? What is it?

TIM: (calmly, half under his breath) I’m looking for a big stick.

STAN: Why?

TIM: So I can beat my mother with it.

BLACK

SILENT BEAT SCENE IN FRONT OF STAGE – G-MAN and G-LADY business: in front of a US map with colored push-pins, pointing, gesturing. Slide projector: image of Milo’s driver’s license photo.)

Scene 2

[TIM and MARIE are in the porch area. TIM is on a step-ladder, unscrewing a broken light bulb.]

MARIE: (innocently) I must use a lot of light.

TIM: You don’t use a lot of light.

MARIE: Well – then something isn’t right!
(pause)

TIM: This light bulb has been SHEARED OFF at the base, Mom.

MARIE: So?

TIM: Do you know what that means?

MARIE: (dimly) It burned out. I left it on.

TIM: No. It did NOT burn out. Someone HIT it with something.
(pause)

MARIE: Well, that’s just outlandish.
(pause)

I mean, it’s not like a bird would just fly into it or –
(pause)

TIM: And that’s another thing!

MARIE: What was the first thing?

TIM: (ignoring her, clambering off stepladder and onto lawn, he kneels down and combs through the grass) Why are there bird feathers all over your lawn?

MARIE: (weakly) Cat?

TIM: (thundering) You don’t own a cat.

MARIE: (helpless) I don’t know, Tim – and don’t shout at me! I live here all alone—

TIM: You don't have to.

MARIE: -- and half the people on this street have animals—

TIM: Two cats and a dog.

MARIE: -- that they just allow to run WILD all day long.

TIM: All of them indoor pets – except the poodle.

MARIE: That is one MEAN poodle.

TIM: But not exactly known for its taste for SPARROW.
(pause)

And those bird-houses (gesturing). What are they? They look like traps!

MARIE: A traveling salesman sold me them.

TIM: Why do they have trap-doors?

MARIE: (half a beat) For the bird-poop – they detach and you can clean them.

TIM: You're trying to toilet train birds?

MARIE: It gets boring! It's a distraction!

TIM: I think you got sold a load of malarkey.

MARIE: (distractingly) Well, that cigar of yours is enough to push me over the edge.

TIM: Leave my cigar alone.

MARIE: It's not like you're Daddy Warbucks!
(pause)

TIM: (gently) What about what we talked about, Mom?

MARIE: (alarmed) What talk? Mother Mary of God!

TIM: About not living alone, Mom?

MARIE: You want me to move into that dreadful Old Age home, don't you?

TIM: It's not called that!