

BENCHED

A simple park bench sits center stage. There is a trash can upstage left. Downstage right is an old (drinking) water fountain.

RANDALL BAKER is seated in the center of the bench. Randall is a man in his early 70s, but looks younger. He has his head tilted back and is soaking up a mid-afternoon sun--eyes closed. Randall is wearing a jogger's jump suit.

MAX KURTZ (also in his 70s) enters. Max is dressed simply. He carries a brown paper bag in one hand and has a small multi-colored throw pillow tucked under his arm. When Max sees Randall on the bench he stops. He studies Randall for a long time.

MAX

Excuse me.

Randall begins to snore.

MAX, cont.

I said...excuse me.

Randall finally stirs and looks over to see Max. The two stare at one another in silence for an unusually long time.

MAX, cont.

You're sitting on my bench.

RANDALL

Your bench?

MAX

I've been coming to this same bench for 15 years.

RANDALL

And that makes it yours?

Squatters' rights.

MAX

I see.

RANDALL

You're not moving.

MAX

You noticed.

RANDALL

Perhaps you've misunderstood.

MAX

I understood.

RANDALL

Then?

MAX

Then what?

RANDALL

Then you should move along.

MAX

Randall stares at him for a moment, then smiles and moves over to one side so that Max can sit next to him.

There you are. You can join me.

RANDALL

I don't want to join you. I want my bench.

MAX

But this bench is in the perfect spot.

RANDALL

MAX

I know that. That's why I've been coming here for 15 years.

RANDALL

And its always been empty when you arrive?

MAX

Yes.

RANDALL

I find that hard to believe. This is a big city.

MAX

But everyone knows this is my bench.

RANDALL

I don't.

MAX

Perhaps you're new in town.

RANDALL

Nope.

MAX

I've never seen you before.

RANDALL

That just proves my point.

MAX

Your "point?"

RANDALL

It's a big city.

MAX

There's a perfectly good bench across the pond.

RANDALL

I know. I tried it. It was perfectly good, but it wasn't perfect. At this time of day, on this bench, the sun hits my face at just the right angle.

MAX

Why don't you just find another bench?

RANDALL

I could ask you the same question.

MAX

Look, I just want to eat my lunch in peace...on my bench.

RANDALL

It's 2:30. A little late for lunch.

MAX

I always take a late lunch. The park is less crowded.

RANDALL

And "your" bench is free.

MAX

Depending on the time of year.

RANDALL

Ah, yes, well...spring can be fickle in New York. Balmy one day, a blizzard the next.

MAX

How long do you think you'll be here?

RANDALL

I'm in no rush. It's my day off.

MAX

I don't want any trouble.

RANDALL

You're no trouble. Just have a seat here. I'm very willing to share the bench.

MAX

Yes, but I'm not. (PAUSE) So...we're at an impasse.

RANDALL

Actually, we're at a bench.

MAX

If you're trying to be clever...I'm not amused.

RANDALL

Now there's something I've never been accused of...being clever.

MAX

I wasn't accusing you of being clever, I asked if you were trying to be clever.

RANDALL

So you don't really think I'm clever?

MAX

I'm sure...given the right occasion and circumstances you have the ability to be clever.

RANDALL

But not amusing.

Randall points toward the bag Max is carrying.

RANDALL, cont.

Lunch?

MAX

As a matter of fact...

RANDALL

A fish sandwich.

MAX

Are you going to move?

RANDALL

Eventually.

MAX

I'll tell you what. I'm going to take a walk. When I come back I expect you to be gone.

RANDALL

That's a big expectation.

MAX

Why are you doing this to me?

RANDALL

I'm not doing anything to you.

Max stands silently for a few moments.

RANDALL, cont.

Come on. Just join me here on the bench. I'm really quite agreeable.

MAX

If you were agreeable you would leave.

RANDALL

I'm not that agreeable.

After a few more moments Max finally sits down next to Randall. Max clutches his paper bag.

RANDALL, cont.

(re: the bag)

Don't stop on my account.

MAX

I'm not stopping anything.

RANDALL

Your lunch...you should go ahead and eat.

MAX

I'm not hungry.

RANDALL

I've ruined your appetite.

MAX

No...you've ruined my day.

RANDALL
But it's such a gorgeous day.

MAX
Perhaps for you.

RANDALL
I get very few days off in my business.

MAX
I really don't care.

RANDALL
You're angry.

MAX
I'm not angry, I'm irritated.

RANDALL
You have a short fuse.

Max jumps up.

MAX
That's it.

Max turns and exits abruptly. In his anger he leaves his paper bag and the throw pillow on the bench.

Randall watches Max leave, then looks over and notices he has left his paper bag. He starts to call after Max, but changes his mind. After a moment he slides over next to the bag and carefully picks it up and peeks inside.

He smiles at what he sees, reaches in and pulls out what appears to be a small finger sandwich wrapped in cellophane. He carefully unwraps the tiny sandwich, studies it for a moment, then begins to eat.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE II Lights come back up on the bench. Randall is sprawled out on the bench. One arm hangs limply down to the ground.

Max enters. He stops short when he sees Randall. He notices his empty paper bag lying on the ground next to the bench.

He quickly rushes over to the bag, picks it up, and looks inside the bag. When he realizes it is empty he leans over Randall and begins shaking him.

MAX

Oh, my God! Wake up! Wake up! Please!

Randall doesn't move. Max shakes him again. Still Randall doesn't move.

MAX, cont.

Damn. What...what have you done?

He stands over Randall for a moment longer. Max bends down toward Randall as if considering performing CPR, but thinks better of it. He looks around for help.

MAX, cont.

Someone! Anyone! Help!

He rushes off.

MAX, cont.

Help! Help!

Shortly after Max exits, Randall stirs and sits up—in great spirits. He picks up the empty paper bag lying nearby.

Max reenters and is startled, but relieved to see Randall.

MAX, cont.

You're alive.

RANDALL
You're surprised.

MAX
No...ah...I'm...

RANDALL
Disappointed.

MAX
Disappointed?

RANDALL
Well, you wanted your bench back.

MAX
Yes, but not...

RANDALL
At my expense.

MAX
Look...I...ah...don't know what's going on here. Did you eat my lunch?

RANDALL
Such a small sandwich. Hardly even warranted its own paper bag. More like a finger sandwich really. The kind they serve at tea parties and funerals.

MAX
"Funerals?" What!?

RANDALL
I'm glad you've returned.

MAX
Listen to me. There's something you need to know about the sandwich.

RANDALL
Poison. I know.

MAX
How could you know about the poison?

RANDALL

You fit the profile.

MAX

The profile? Oh...ah...you're a cop...a detective.

RANDALL

Nothing that glamorous. (PAUSE) I'm the angel of death.

MAX

Excuse me?

RANDALL

Why? You heard me. I know I'm not what you might expect, but I'm the real thing—not some Hollywood actor type. You know, Robert Redford played me once in an old “Twilight Zone” episode. I was flattered, but it just wasn't believable.

MAX

You're nuts.

RANDALL

Yes...of course. Only a nut would take on this job. Not that I had a choice in the matter.

MAX

Mister, I don't know who you are or what game you're trying to play, but if you ate my lunch we really need to get you to a hospital emergency room.

RANDALL

Stop fretting.

MAX

But there was enough poison in that sandwich to kill five men.

RANDALL

That would give it a little extra kick.

MAX

This is nothing to joke about.

RANDALL

I'm not joking.

MAX

(after a moment)

Oh...wait...I get it. You didn't really eat the sandwich. You're just trying to get even with me...to teach me a lesson.

RANDALL

You're half right.

MAX

So what did you do with the sandwich?

Randall simply smiles. Max points to the trash can as if he's seen the answer to his mystery.

MAX, cont.

Ah ha!

Max quickly crosses to the trash can and begins going through the trash. He has his back to Randall.

RANDALL

You won't find what you're looking for in there.

Randall fills the paper bag he's been holding with air and pops it. A startled Max turns around.

RANDALL, cont.

You've really made a mess.

Randall crumples up what is left of the paper bag and tosses it toward the trash can as Max moves toward him.

MAX

You did not eat the sandwich. You couldn't have eaten the sandwich.

RANDALL

Believe what you want. Most people do anyway.

Randall crosses to the water fountain and leans over it.

MAX
(re: the fountain)

You're wasting your time. The damn fountain doesn't...

Randall snaps a finger and water shoots up from the fountain. Randall takes a long drink.

MAX, cont.

Work.

After another moment Max begins to laugh.

MAX, cont.

All right. I give up. You win. You did eat the sandwich. You're the angel of death and you've come to take me away.

RANDALL

I told you...it's my day off.

MAX

Sorry. I forgot that part.

RANDALL

I realize this is hard to believe...

MAX

Please, don't say anything else, mister.

RANDALL

Randall...my name is Randall.

MAX

Randall? Why would the angel of death need a name?

RANDALL

I don't need a name. It is my name. Kind of a nice personal touch. Softens things up a bit.

MAX

Fine. Well...Randall...if it's your "day off" you won't be of much use to me.

RANDALL

That's not necessarily true. Why?

MAX
Why?

RANDALL
Why do you want to die?

MAX
The question is...why would I want to live?

RANDALL
It beats the alternative.

MAX
There's always heaven.

RANDALL
Out of the question. Suicides don't qualify.

MAX
God's rule?

RANDALL
Nah, I just made that up. A little gallows humor.

MAX
Shouldn't you be somewhere else? Thousands of people die every day.

RANDALL
More than that.

MAX
My point exactly. So, how can you take a day off?

RANDALL
It's part of the omnipotent thing. I can't explain it...hell, I can't even spell it.

MAX
Why would spelling matter to the angel of death?

RANDALL
My mother was a stickler about spelling.

MAX

The angel of death has a mother? Why would the...? Wait. Have you been here before?

RANDALL

You got me. I didn't start out with this position. I was one of you...human.

MAX

And just how did you attain your position?

RANDALL

I was you...a long time ago. I don't mean I was literally you. I mean, I wanted to kill myself. And I did. Actually I changed my mind about half way through, but when you jump off a cliff and you're headed for the jagged rocks at the bottom it's a little late to turn back.

MAX

How did it feel?

RANDALL

Ouch.

MAX

You don't look like a man who threw himself on the rocks.

RANDALL

Who needs a plastic surgeon when you've got God on your side.

MAX

So you kill yourself and as a reward you get to be the Angel of Death?

RANDALL

One of them.

MAX

Right...one of them.

RANDALL

That's kind of how it works. Bummer, huh? But, who knows...maybe my day off will be my lucky day. And you could be my ticket out of this job.

MAX

How's that?

RANDALL

I stop you, I get a promotion.

MAX

Well, you can kiss your promotion good-bye, because nothing you do or say will change my mind.

RANDALL

At least I delayed things a bit.

MAX

Aren't you screwing with "God's plan?" Isn't each of us supposed to die when our time comes?

RANDALL

Suicides don't count, unless of course it's a matter of euthanasia.

MAX

How do you know I'm not suffering from some terminal illness?

RANDALL

You're good for a little while longer, but it's a good thing you gave up those cigarettes when you did.

MAX

So God doesn't know when we're going to die.

RANDALL

God doesn't always keep tabs on everyone. Plus, of course, there's free will.

MAX

Dear Lord, a Methodist.

RANDALL

Actually I have more of an eclectic attitude with regard to my religious preference.

MAX

Why's that?

Randall smiles as he looks to the sky.

RANDALL

Company policy.

MAX

Why am I even listening to you?

RANDALL

Good point. If you hurry you could catch the A train uptown. Just jump right on the track. End things in a jiffy.

MAX

Now you're encouraging me?

RANDALL

Not exactly. Just proving a point. Some part of you doesn't really want to die or you would have left a long time ago.

MAX

I did leave.

RANDALL

Ah yes, but you came back.

MAX

For my sandwich.

RANDALL

And you wanted to save my life.

MAX

You're already dead...or so you say.

RANDALL

Well, there's no need to be nasty about it.

The two men stare at one another silently for a few moments.

RANDALL, cont.

You're still here.

MAX

I suppose I'm curious.

RANDALL

That's a good sign. Shows you still have a zest for life.

MAX

I lost my zest about the same time my papa took the training wheels off my bicycle.

RANDALL

Tell you what. I'm going to make you a deal. Just pass a little time with me. Let me try to convince you that it's not time for you to check out yet...that you've got a reason to live. I'm not asking for a lot of your time.

MAX

What's in it for you?

RANDALL

I told you...a promotion.

MAX

No tricks.

RANDALL

Hey, I can't stop you. I told you...it's my day off. But I could help you. I've got connections. I might be able to help you check out naturally. That would be better for every one.

MAX

Better for everyone?

RANDALL

Correct me if I'm wrong, but that life insurance policy you left in your son's name won't pay off if you, excuse the expression, "off yourself."

MAX

You know about that?

RANDALL

Like I said...I've got connections.

MAX

Let me get this straight. I give you a chance to talk me out of doing myself in, if I'm not convinced...you'll help me do the deed.

RANDALL

That's the deal.

MAX

Pain free?

RANDALL

Let's just put it this way, anything would be better than that sandwich you were going to choke on.

MAX

I wasn't going to choke...it was poison.

RANDALL

I hate to tell you, buddy, a fish bone was going to get lodged in your throat.

MAX

Really?

RANDALL

It wouldn't have been pretty.

MAX

You can see into the future?

RANDALL

I have to get clearance first. I'm not a free agent. But personally I like to live in the moment...or die in the moment, as the case may be. So, what do you say? You going to give me a shot? Look, all I'm asking is you kill a little time with me. If it doesn't work out...I kill you.

MAX

(after a moment)

All right. You've got a deal. But it's my choice, right? I'm not convinced, you throw the switch and I'm oughta here.

RANDALL

You got it.

Randall extends his hand. Max takes his hand and looks down to Randall's hand as he holds onto it.

MAX

Damn, you're cold.

RANDALL

It goes with the territory. Shall we begin.

MAX

That's your job.

Max takes out an old pocket watch and checks the time.

MAX, cont.

I'll give you one hour. One hour to give me a reason to live.

RANDALL

Well...ah...it's a beautiful day.

MAX

I've seen better.

RANDALL

I hear the Carnegie Deli has a special on their roast beef sandwiches tomorrow.

MAX

I lost my teeth years ago. I've got bad dentures and it's embarrassing eating in public.

RANDALL

I see. I could give you the winning lottery ticket numbers for tomorrow.

MAX

The jackpot is only worth 5 million.

RANDALL

You're a tough case.

MAX

You betcha. Give up?

RANDALL

Not yet, but I need you to give me something to work with.

MAX

I'm not interested in helping you.

RANDALL

You're still mad about your sandwich and the bench.

MAX

My favorite bench.

RANDALL

I guess I'm going to have to pull out all the stops.

MAX

That's right. And you've only got...

Max pulls out his watch again and sees that it has stopped.

He taps the watch several times. As Max is looking to his watch, Randall moves behind the bench and turns away from Max.

MAX, cont.

My watch has stopped.

RANDALL

Of course it has.

MAX

This watch belonged to my father.

Randall remains with his back to Max. When he speaks again his voice is lower and he speaks with a distinct German accent.

RANDALL

That's right. I'm glad it means so much to you. It meant a great deal to me.

Max is stunned at the voice he hears.

MAX

What...what's going on?

RANDALL

You're a smart boy. You figure it out.

Randall comes around the bench to face Max. His whole persona has changed.

MAX

Papa? Papa? Is that you?

RANDALL

Well, it's not Mother Teresa?

MAX

All right. This isn't funny. Whatever trick you're playing...I want you to stop.

RANDALL

Ah, but you liked my tricks...my magic tricks. And the games we used to play.

MAX

Okay, Randall, cut it out. Now!

RANDALL

Who on earth is Randall?

MAX

Damn it, this isn't funny.

RANDALL

Watch your mouth, young man.

MAX

I don't believe this.

RANDALL

I thought you'd be happy to see me.

MAX

No...I mean, yes, I am...but...but you've been dead for 66 years.

RANDALL

Has it been that long? I wasn't keeping track.

MAX

This isn't possible.

RANDALL

That doesn't sound like my boy. You used to believe anything was possible.

MAX

I used to believe in your magic tricks too.

RANDALL

Of course you did.

With great flourish, Randall pulls a bouquet of fake flowers from up his sleeve.

RANDALL, cont.

Ta da!

MAX

They're feathers.

RANDALL

Yeah, but not bad for someone who's been dead for over 60 years.

MAX

Why are you here? Really?

RANDALL

Thought you might like to go fishing. We've got a beautiful day...the pond here.

MAX

They don't allow fishing in this pond.

RANDALL

Then we'll go to the river. You used to love going to the river with me.

MAX

I never caught a thing.

RANDALL

That's not true. I remember that ten pounder you caught...Fourth of July weekend.

MAX

It was a damn carp...a bottom feeder.

RANDALL

Yes, but you were so excited. We took it home and put it in the bath tub. Your mother nearly had a heart attack when she went to draw her evening bath.

MAX

Don't know why I wanted to keep the stupid thing alive.

RANDALL

You were proud of it...and I was proud of you. But this here, son...what you're thinking of now...this suicide idea...

MAX

I'm tired, papa...of everything.

RANDALL

So take a nap. Better still, grab that old fishing pole and head down to the river.

MAX

And catch another worthless carp?

RANDALL

Ah, but that wasn't just any worthless carp...that was Carlos.

MAX

"Carlos?"

RANDALL

You gave your fish a name.

MAX

Dear Lord, I forgot.

RANDALL

That's not possible. And the day after you caught Carlos we took him back to the river so you could set him free...in honor of Independence Day. (PAUSE) That was a great summer.

MAX

That was a terrible summer...the summer you died.

RANDALL

That's not the part of the summer I remember the most. Time passes. You forget the bad stuff...or let it go.

MAX

I can't. I've kept track of every day since the day you were killed.

RANDALL

A young boy should have better things to do. Life goes on.

MAX

Not when you're responsible for your own father's death.

RANDALL

My, my, son. A little grandiose, don't you think?

MAX

But it's the truth.

RANDALL

I see.

MAX

You don't remember what happened? How it happened?

RANDALL

Actually all I recall was hearing the train coming out of nowhere...then blackness.

MAX

You were on your way back home...for your watch.

He holds up the watch.

MAX, cont.

This watch. You never went to work without your watch. You always said the most important piece of equipment for a good conductor was his timepiece.

RANDALL

I said that? Funny...I don't remember saying that.

MAX

I had slipped the watch out of your pocket the night before. I just wanted to hold it. I fell asleep with it. By the time I woke up the next morning you had already left for work. I tried to run to catch you. You were coming around the corner, coming back home...on the trestle, over the river. You always told us to never walk on the trestle.

RANDALL

Good advice.

MAX

The train came around the corner so fast. I screamed, but you couldn't hear me. You waved.

RANDALL

Of course I did.

MAX

Then you were gone...in an instant.

RANDALL

I would imagine so.

MAX

Don't you see? It shouldn't have happened. If I hadn't taken your watch the night before you would have had no reason to turn back. You wouldn't have been killed.

RANDALL

You were eight years old, leibling. A boy. Little boys are curious.

MAX

I wasn't curious, I was stupid.

Randall laughs.

RANDALL

My, oh my.

MAX

What? What is it?

RANDALL

I remember now...why I was coming back. It had nothing to do with the watch. I didn't even know it was missing...not yet. I wanted an extra piece of your mother's rhubarb pie. I couldn't remember if I had put a piece in my lunch pail. I stopped by the tracks and checked my pail. No pie. I had to have that pie. You remember your mother's pie, don't you?

MAX

Yes, but...

RANDALL

But nothing. What happened to me wasn't your fault. It was my darn sweet tooth and your mother's rhubarb pie.

MAX

No.

RANDALL

Come on, now, son, you know better than to talk back to your papa.

MAX

That can't be right.

RANDALL

Sure it is, son. Trust your papa.

Randall holds out his hand to take the watch.

RANDALL, cont.

May I?

Max hands him the watch. Randall rises and moves behind Max.

RANDALL, cont.

This sure is a good old watch. Never lost a second of time in all the years I had it. You take good care of this watch, son. Be sure you wind it regular...but not too tight.

Randall hands the watch back to Max, leans over him, kisses him on the top of the head, then turns his back to Max and the audience. Max stares down at the watch and is surprised at what he sees.

MAX

Its...its running.

Randall turns back around. He has resumed his previous persona.

RANDALL

Sure it is.

MAX

Papa? Where'd you go?

RANDALL

Excuse me. I may be a old, but I'm not old enough to be your father.

MAX

What did you do? Just now?

RANDALL

I don't know what you're talking about.

MAX

Yes you do.

RANDALL

All right, I do...but it's exhausting and I can't explain it anyway.

MAX

I'm onto you now. Your some new age fruitcake...into that channeling crap.

RANDALL

Channeling? Never heard of it. Must have been after my time.

MAX

How did you know about my father...and his voice?

RANDALL

Your father had a nice voice. A singer in the church choir. Never missed a Sunday. Right?

MAX

He sang bass.

RANDALL

I'm a tenor myself. (HE SINGS) "Every time it rains, it rains. Pennies from..." Sorry. Look, you weren't responsible for your father's death. That oughta make you feel better. Now, why don't you go on home, take a nice hot bath, and forget about taking an early dirt nap.

MAX

Nothing's changed. I still want out. So, it's time for you to keep your part of the bargain.

RANDALL

Not so fast. I'm not ready to throw in the towel just yet.

MAX

Well, you're going to have to do better than this last little stunt of yours.

RANDALL

Hey, that was no stunt.

MAX

Whatever. Anyway...I don't care what it was. I'm still checking out.

RANDALL

You don't feel a little better? Just a twinge of hope?

MAX

Screw hope.

RANDALL

All right, then, how 'bout love? Now there's a reason to live.

MAX

Not if it's dead.

RANDALL

Come on, now. You've got a son.

MAX

Who hasn't spoken to me in 25 years.

RANDALL

That doesn't stop the love.

MAX

"Love." Humph. It's overrated. Nothing but trouble.

RANDALL

Ah, yes, well, here comes trouble.

Randall looks off stage, then picks up the paper flowers that Max has left lying on the bench. He hands the flowers to Max and takes a few steps back. Before Max has a chance to give the flowers back a young woman (KATHERINE MARIE ZANE) enters from STAGE RIGHT. Katherine nears the bench and smiles at Max when she sees him holding the flowers. She passes Max and seems about to exit, but stops. She seems a bit surprised by her sudden compulsion to stop. She turns back to face Max and smiles again.

KATHERINE

Good afternoon.

MAX

Good...good afternoon.

KATHERINE

(indicating the bench)

Mind if I sit for a moment?

MAX

No...ah...help yourself.

KATHERINE

Thank you.

Max turns to Randall.

MAX

This woman...she looks so familiar.

RANDALL

You don't say.

MAX

If this is another one of your tricks.

Randall shrugs innocently.

KATHERINE

I beg your pardon?

MAX

Oh...not you...I was just talking with my...ah...friend.

Max motions toward Randall. Katherine looks in Randall's direction, but obviously doesn't see him.

KATHERINE

Your friend?

MAX

Yes. You don't...

RANDALL
(under his breath)

She can't see me.

Max seems frozen in place for a few moments.

RANDALL, cont.

(still whispering)

Go along. You don't want to keep such a lovely young woman waiting.

After a moment, Max turns back to Katherine, but then he returns to Randall again.

MAX

If she can't see you, then I'm assuming she can't hear you, so why are you whispering?

RANDALL

Good point.

KATHERINE

I love the park this time of day. It's very peaceful. I don't think I could live in New York City without the park, do you? I don't mean to hog the bench. Come. Sit with me.

Max hesitates for a moment, then moves over and sits on the bench next to Katherine. Randall watches everything with a smile.

MAX

You...ah...remind me of someone.

KATHERINE

Really?

MAX

Probably just my old eyes playing tricks on me. Then, again, it is a small world.

KATHERINE

Or a big city.

MAX

I've heard that before.

Max glances to Randall who smiles smugly.

KATHERINE

Sorry. My mom was always saying that.

MAX

I have an...acquaintance who says the same thing.

KATHERINE

Kind of a tired cliché.

MAX

I think that's the nature of clichés.

Katherine smiles and extends a hand toward Max.

KATHERINE

My name's Katherine. Katherine Marie Zane. My friends call me Katie...another cliché.

MAX

Oh...no.

Max gets up and moves back to Randall.

MAX, cont.

What are you trying to pull now?

KATHERINE

Is something wrong?

RANDALL

I'm not pulling a thing. Your friend asked you a question.

Max returns to sit next to Katherine.

MAX

Your name. It can't be Katherine Marie

KATHERINE

That's what it says on my driver's license, which I would be happy to show you, but it's a terrible picture.

MAX

Katherine Marie. Is that a...ah...a family name?

KATHERINE

It was my grandmother's name.

MAX

(almost to himself)

Katherine Marie Slovak.

KATHERINE

You knew my grandmother?

MAX

Well...I...ah...don't know. Katherine Marie isn't a particularly unusual name.

KATHERINE

But Slovak is. At least it was in Watertown, Connecticut.

MAX

Your grandmother was from Watertown?

KATHERINE

Yes. Are you all right?

MAX

I'm fine...I mean, I will be.

KATHERINE

You have me at a disadvantage.

MAX

I do?

KATHERINE

I don't know your name.

MAX

I'm sorry. Yes, of course...my name is Max. Max Kurtz.

KATHERINE

Well, Max Kurtz, this can't be just a coincidence...our meeting like this. It must be fate. Tell me how you knew my grandmother.

MAX

I...we grew up together in Watertown.

KATHERINE

I never knew my grandmother. She died long before I was born. I know her through pictures and stories. She was quite a beauty.

MAX

Yes, she was. You look very much like her.

KATHERINE

If that's true...thank you. Tell me about her.

MAX

Well...I...it's been a long time.

KATHERINE

Were you one of her suitors? I heard she had many. I'll bet you were a handsome devil in your time...not that you're still not handsome.

MAX

Please. I'm an ugly, toothless, old fool.

KATHERINE

You're much too hard on yourself.

MAX

You're much too kind.

KATHERINE

Not really. Now, please...tell me about my grandmother. Something I don't know. Something naughty.

MAX

She organized dances...in the church basement.

KATHERINE

Now there's a scandal.

MAX

It was at the time.

KATHERINE

Was she a good dancer?

MAX

The best. She smelled of lavender.

KATHERINE

You were one of her suitors. I can still see the sparkle in your eyes.

MAX

Your grandmother and I were not right for one another.

KATHERINE

Why don't I believe you?

MAX

Katherine's father didn't approve of me.

KATHERINE

Ah yes, the man who owned all of Watertown...and everyone in it. He could be quite the bully.

MAX

He was just protecting what was his.

KATHERINE

"What was his?" Max Kurtz, I'm disappointed in you. I would have taken you for a more modern man.

MAX

It's best if you simply took me for the old fool that I am.

Max gets up and crosses to Randall.

MAX, cont.

I want her to leave now.

RANDALL

I can't help you with this one, pal.

MAX

Of course you can help me. You set this up. I know you did.

RANDALL

I may have started the ball rolling, but hey, it's that free will thing again.

MAX

Damn you. If you think this is going to change my mind, you're wrong. This could push me further over the edge.

RANDALL

A calculated risk.

KATHERINE

Max? Max? Have I upset you? I'm sorry.

He returns to her side.

MAX

You haven't done anything wrong. It's just that thinking of your grandmother again brings up some painful memories.

KATHERINE

Like the dances in the church basement?

MAX

Those weren't the painful memories.

KATHERINE

Well, then...shall we?

She holds up her arms--offering herself to him for a dance.

MAX

What are you doing?

KATHERINE

I want you to dance with me.

MAX

Here? Now? In Central Park? What if someone comes by?

KATHERINE

This is New York City, for god's sake, no one's going to care. They might even cut in.

MAX

There's no music.

KATHERINE

We'll make our own. Come on.

He moves toward her. She moves closer to him and he takes her in his arms. They stand motionless for a few moments. Finally Randall begins to hum--providing music. (The Sidewalks of New York) Max gives Randall a dirty look over his shoulder. Randall smiles innocently as he continues to hum.

Katherine and Max start to dance. As they continue, Max begins to enjoy himself.

KATHERINE, cont.

You're not a bad dancer, Max Kurtz.

MAX

And you smell of lavender.

KATHERINE

You loved her very much, didn't you?

MAX

Yes.

KATHERINE

And she loved you.

Max stops dancing suddenly and moves away from Katherine.

KATHERINE, cont.

Why did you stop?

MAX

Because this is silly. I'm not an 18 year old kid. I'm 72 years old. I don't want to remember some teenage crush I had over 50 years ago.

KATHERINE

But it was more than a crush.

MAX

You don't know that. You don't know me.

KATHERINE

Of course I do. You're Max Kurtz. The love of Katherine Marie Slovak's life.

MAX

Wait a moment. You knew who I was? It's not possible that you would know me.

KATHERINE

Ah, but grandmother did...and she never forgot you. Do you know she never understood why you left her?

MAX

I didn't leave her. I left Watertown. And, anyway, I told you...we weren't right for one another.

KATHERINE

She never stopped loving you. You were the great love of her life.

MAX

It would not have worked. We would have destroyed one another.

KATHERINE

You mean her father would have destroyed you.

MAX

Please, go. I really need to be alone now.

He turns his back on Katherine. She moves to Max.

KATHERINE

You're a lucky man, Max Kurtz...to have known the kind of love you and my grandmother knew. You owned a piece of her heart until the day she died.

Katherine kisses Max on the cheek and begins to leave.

Katherine Marie.

MAX

Yes?

KATHERINE

I'm sorry.

MAX

I know.

KATHERINE

Katherine continues her exit, but stops as she passes by Randall. She pauses for a moment and looks front—as if she senses another presence. After a moment she smiles and completes her exit. Max collapses onto the bench and removes a note that is yellowed with age.

RANDALL
(re: the note)
What have you got there?

MAX
It's the last note I received from Katherine Marie. I forgot I'd even saved it. I found it this morning in the bottom of an old desk drawer. I didn't need to find this...not today.

RANDALL
You must've found it for a reason.

MAX
Reason!? Yes. This note gave me a final reason to do what I came here to do. And if you think this little set up you pulled with Katherine's granddaughter was supposed to change my mind, you made a big mistake.

RANDALL
But I thought it went rather well.

MAX
Now I believe you. You are the angel of death...Dr. Mengele. You torture your victims before you do them in.

RANDALL

That's not what I'm doing.

MAX

I see. Just what is it you think you're doing?

RANDALL

You've had real love in your life. Do you know how many people have never experienced what you experienced? That alone should make you want to embrace life.

MAX

But I lost that. I blew it. I threw it away.

RANDALL

So it didn't work out exactly the way you would have liked. You can never feel real joy in your life unless you've experienced real pain.

MAX

Oh, that's pithy.

RANDALL

I'm glad you liked it.

MAX

You're an idiot. Let me ask you a question. Did you get all of your facts straight before you decided to take me on?

RANDALL

I...I felt confident that I could turn you around.

MAX

Well, let me turn you around. The reason things "didn't work out" exactly the way I planned was because Katherine Marie's father offered me a bundle of money if I would leave town, without a word, and never come back. And I took it.

RANDALL

Of course you took it.

MAX

What do you mean, of course I took it?

RANDALL

Correct me if I'm wrong, but Katherine Marie's father told you he would cut her out of his estate permanently if she were to marry you. And he threatened to foreclose on your widowed mother's home.

MAX

So I wanted to help my mother out. That hardly qualifies me for sainthood. And what about "love conquers all?"

RANDALL

It's been known to work on occasion. What did Katherine say in her last note?

MAX

You seem to know so much, you tell me.

RANDALL

I don't read private mail.

MAX

She offered to run off with me, but my love would have been a poor substitute for the things Katherine Marie was used to.

RANDALL

Ah, yes, the cold comfort of cash...quite the aphrodisiac.

MAX

You know what, friend, your time is almost up...and so is mine.

Max holds up Katherine's envelope for Randall to see and begins to tear it to pieces. When he's finished he crosses over to the trash bin and deposits the torn letter into the trash.

MAX, cont.

There. Now, let's end this whole charade right now. I'm ready to meet my maker.

RANDALL

But I still have some time left.

MAX

Forget it. If you're going to get your promotion it's going to have to be at someone else's expense.

RANDALL

But it has to be you.

MAX

Why? What difference does it make?

RANDALL

We're connected.

MAX

Right. We're all connected.

RANDALL

But you and I are especially connected.

MAX

I see. So, what are we...some metaphysical odd couple?

RANDALL

Something much more concrete.

MAX

And why should I listen to you, anyway? You chose the same route out of this lousy life.

RANDALL

Yes, I did. And I have been forever sorry.

MAX

Looks to me like you landed yourself a pretty cushy job.

RANDALL

I suppose it might look that way to you.

MAX

At least I've got reasons to end it all. Everything and every person I have touched in my life I have screwed up. My father...

RANDALL

I told you...that wasn't your fault.

MAX

I have no reason to believe you. And you saw...you heard what I did to Katherine Marie. I broke her heart.

RANDALL

And your own.

MAX

Look, I don't trust you, so save your breath.

RANDALL

Ah, now there's the problem...trust. Give me one last chance...to gain your trust.

MAX

You want my trust, then I want the truth.

RANDALL

The truth?

MAX

About you. I want to know what drove you over the edge.

RANDALL

I told you, I didn't drive, I jumped.

MAX

Your cleverness is starting to bore me.

RANDALL

Oh.

MAX

So...the truth...or stick a fork in me because I'm done...and you're going to do it.

RANDALL

Very well. The truth. I was in love.

MAX

Ah...unrequited love.

RANDALL

Not exactly. We were married. We had three wonderful children together. My wife was devoted to all of us. And she loved me...as best she could.

MAX

And you killed yourself?

RANDALL

Sounds kind of silly now, doesn't it?

MAX

Wait. I've got it. You lost everything in the market...or something like that.

RANDALL

Never invested. In fact, I never had to work a day in my life. My wife inherited her family's very ample estate.

MAX

So far your suicide is making absolutely no sense.

RANDALL

So it would seem.

MAX

Unless, of course...your wife died.

RANDALL

That would have been easier.

MAX

You didn't...no...that's not possible. You didn't kill your wife, did you?

RANDALL

I'm hurt. What do you take me for anyway?

MAX

Excuse me, but you are the Angel of Death.

RANDALL

It's just a title.

MAX

Okay, let me get this straight, you marry this beautiful, independently wealthy, woman, have three wonderful children and one day you take a dive onto Plymouth rock for no good reason.

RANDALL

That's about the gist of it.

MAX

I gotta tell you, pal, you're not inspiring me to keep on keepin' on.

RANDALL

No?

MAX

How about your health? Were you sick? A bad ticker?

RANDALL

You're getting warmer. My heart was breaking.

MAX

You fell in love with another woman.

RANDALL

Never. But there was someone else in my life...our lives. Someone my wife could never forget.

MAX

You said she was devoted to you and loved you.

RANDALL

As best she could.

MAX

I don't get the problem.

RANDALL

I would expect you, of all people, to understand.

MAX

Why?

RANDALL

Because you've had real love. The kind that smells of lavender.

MAX

I don't want to talk about Katherine again.

RANDALL

But you asked for the truth.

MAX

I asked you why you killed yourself.

RANDALL

And I'm telling you why.

MAX

What would Katie have to do with your suicide?

RANDALL

Katherine Marie Slovak was my wife.

MAX

You wanna run that by me again...slowly.

RANDALL

I was married to Katherine Marie.

MAX

You have a very sick sense of humor.

RANDALL

It's true. I moved to Watertown three years after you had gone. I worked for Katherine's father. I fell in love with her the first time I saw her.

MAX

I don't need to hear this.

RANDALL

Ah, but you do. You need to hear all of it. It's important.

MAX

You were married to Katherine Marie and you killed yourself.

RANDALL

That's right. I married a woman who never stopped loving someone else. You.

MAX

This is another one of your tricks. You're making this up.

RANDALL

Katherine had two brothers, Sam and William. Her favorite flower was the peony, she made killer black bean soup, and she hated fishing because she couldn't stand putting worms on the hook.

MAX

You took Katherine fishing?

RANDALL

No, but you did. She used to love to tell the kids about your fishing trips.

MAX

You could have gotten that information from your...source.

RANDALL

God's not big on minutia.

MAX

I'm sure her love for me passed.

RANDALL

It didn't. And I could feel it. All of the time we were together. She was never cruel...never tormented me with it...but I tormented myself. I thought I could live with it, but I couldn't.

MAX

This little rendezvous today, between you and me...this isn't a coincidence, is it?

RANDALL

Not exactly.

MAX

So everything we've been acting out here...it's all lies.

RANDALL

No, no...everything has been true. Though this isn't really my day off...more like a working holiday.

MAX

All right. Listen carefully. I want you to leave. I don't want your "help." I just want to do this thing alone...in peace.

RANDALL

But I'm trying to tell you, if you do this, you'll have no peace.

MAX

Give it a rest. If you came here to stop me...you blew it.

RANDALL

But you're not through. There's more for you to do before you move on.

MAX

There's nothing left for me.

RANDALL

There is.

MAX

All right. I'll bite. What else is there for me?

RANDALL

I can't tell you.

MAX

You can't, or you won't?

RANDALL

Hey, I'm the Angel of Death, not some side show fortune teller.

MAX

But you can see into the future.

RANDALL

I told you...I have to get clearance.

MAX

Fine. We'll forget that. Just keep your part of our deal. Now.

RANDALL

You're positive.

MAX

Absolutely.

RANDALL

Very well. You want to die standing, sitting, lying down?

MAX

I don't care.

RANDALL

Awake or asleep? We can do it either way.

MAX

Hey, dead is dead.

RANDALL

I wish I had said that. Any last words?

MAX

Yeah...sure..."Rosebud."

RANDALL

That's been used.

MAX

Quit stalling.

RANDALL

Okay ...here we go.

Randall moves closer to Max, who stands near the park bench. He places a hand on Max's shoulder.

MAX

I don't feel a thing.

RANDALL

I promised you no pain.

Suddenly Max reaches up and grabs his right arm, in pain.

RANDALL, cont.

Well, a little pain.

Max collapses onto the bench. His head drops onto his chest and his eyes close. Randall sits down on the bench next to Max. The sound of an ice cream truck can be heard in the distance. Randall brightens. He gets up and heads toward the sounds of the truck.

After a moment, Max opens his eyes and raises his head. He looks around, curious. He's also surprised to still be on the park bench. Randall reenters with two ice cream cones. He sits down next to Max.

MAX

What's going on? Am I dead?

RANDALL

You were. For a moment. I changed my mind.

MAX

You can't do that.

RANDALL

Sure I can. It's part of that omnipotent thing. Plus, I thought of another reason for you to go on living.

Max looks at him, puzzled. Randall smiles as he extends one of the ice cream cones to him.

RANDALL, cont.

Butter pecan ice cream, with sprinkles.

Max takes the cone and, after a moment, he takes a lick of the ice cream. The two men sit silently, enjoying their cones. Max raises his cone to take another lick and the top scoop of ice cream falls into his lap. Max looks down at the ice cream in his lap.

RANDALL

You should clean that up. You want to be presentable.

MAX

Where I'm going it's not going to matter.

RANDALL

You can never be too sure about where you're going.

MAX

I know where I should be going.

RANDALL

A lot of people wouldn't agree with you.

MAX

What have you got planned now...some kind of testimonial? Are you going to parade all of my friends out here to try to convince me that my life is worth living?

RANDALL

Would that change your mind?

MAX

Not even a little bit.

RANDALL

Too bad.

Randall can't stand to see the ice cream on Max's lap. He reaches into his pocket, takes out a handkerchief, and reaches over to clean up the ice cream.

MAX

What the hell do you think you're doing?

RANDALL

Like I said, I want you to be presentable.

Max shakes his head, but still allows Randall to clean him up.

MAX

(after a moment)

Hey ...Randall, Katherine said her grandmother died before she was born.

RANDALL

Yes. She was only forty-three. She died seventeen years after I made my rather rude exit.

MAX

What happened?

RANDALL

Her heart just...stopped.

MAX

Some people have all the luck.

RANDALL

You can't be that cynical.

MAX

But I am. So, you see...I'm not worth saving. You know what...I'll bet there were times when you even wished me dead.

RANDALL

Well...ah...I wouldn't go that far.

MAX

Ah ha! I'm onto you. Half way through your swan dive onto the rocks you said you changed your mind.

RANDALL

Yes I did.

MAX

And I'll bet I know what you were thinking. "It ought to be that other s.o.b. and not me headed for the great beyond."

RANDALL

Actually I was wondering if I had changed my underwear.

MAX

You're not going to joke your way out of this one, pal. There's something fishy here. Wait a second. You said Katie died when she was forty-three, seventeen years after you.

RANDALL

That's right.

MAX

How old were you?

RANDALL

Twenty-eight.

MAX

That's not possible. Look at you. You've got to be what...seventy...seventy-five?

RANDALL

Age is all in your mind.

MAX

Tell that to my back and knees. I want to know what's going on here. Right now.

RANDALL

Nothing's going on. I'm here to help you and in return...

MAX

That's a load of crap. If you died at twenty-eight, how come you look so much older now?

RANDALL

It's simple really. Most folks think after they die they get to skip through eternity as youngsters.

MAX

And that's not the case?

RANDALL

Not if you contribute to your own demise. God is not a big fan of suicide. So, in most cases, you pull the plug on yourself you get to continue aging up to the point where you would have died naturally.

MAX

A vengeful God, eh.

RANDALL

I wouldn't go that far, but God is not immune to mood swings.

MAX

God is a woman?

RANDALL

Let's just say God has a feminine side and leave it at that.

MAX

Well, whatever he or she is, God is wasting a lot of valuable time on me. I don't want to die just because my life is miserable. I've brought a lot of misery to other peoples' lives as well. Probably the best thing I did for Katherine Marie was to walk out of her life.

RANDALL

March 27th, right?

MAX

Yes.

RANDALL

Today.

MAX

That's right...and it's also the day my wife died.

RANDALL

I know. I was there.

MAX

You were...oh, right...of course. And you know where I was when my wife died?

RANDALL

The Terminal Bar on Eighth Ave.

MAX

Now there's an irony, I'm getting loaded at the "Terminal" bar and my wife is killed on her way to pick me up at the train station in Stamford.

RANDALL

An accident.

MAX

You mean, another accident, like my father's death.

RANDALL

You can't blame yourself for what happened to your wife.

MAX

My son can. We haven't spoken since just after my wife's funeral.

RANDALL

You were working that night...covering the Knicks for The Times.

MAX

Right. And I was just unwinding after the game with a few drinks before I had to catch the train home. Only it wasn't just a few drinks...and it wasn't just any night. It was March 27th.

RANDALL

Katherine Marie again.

MAX

I got so loaded. I called my wife. We only lived two miles from the station.

RANDALL

The roads were icy.

MAX

I loved my wife.

RANDALL

She wanted to pick you up.

MAX

I could have walked home, for God's sake.

RANDALL

You can't control everything in life.

MAX

I'm a poor excuse for a man.

RANDALL

Damn it! Stop beating yourself up!

Randall has stunned himself. Max is stunned as well and the two men stare at one another.

MAX

(after a moment)

Oooh. An angel with attitude.

RANDALL

Yes...well...I got carried away...a little emotional.

MAX

Why do you care so much about me, anyway? You say you never wished me dead, yet, according to you, I'm the guy who had Katherine Marie's heart.

RANDALL

Don't start that again.

MAX

Hell, I might as well have been the one who pushed you over the edge of that cliff.

RANDALL

That was my own mess, thank you very much.

MAX

You still haven't answered my question. Why do you care so much about me?

RANDALL

I told you...ah...I'm looking for a promotion.

MAX

There's more to it than that. There are a lot of poor schmucks out there you could try to stop from killing themselves.

RANDALL

But we're connected.

MAX

Katherine Marie.

RANDALL

She was our one true love.

MAX

And we both left her.

RANDALL

Yes, but you at least thought you were leaving for Katherine. I had no real reason. I left Katherine alone...with two sons and a daughter to raise.

MAX

Because she didn't love you enough?

RANDALL

That's right.

MAX

Woah, wait a minute. You're trying to make me feel noble. That's a cheap trick and it won't work.

RANDALL

No, no...I'm not playing games. Death is not a game. I don't want you to make the same mistake I made...leaving before your time. I missed out on so much...my children growing up, my grand-children...Katherine Marie... Listen to me, dying is easy, regret is hard.

MAX

You know what, I'm getting sick of your catchy little phrases. Besides, I've earned the right to die anyway I see fit. I've lived my life, regrets and all. And at least I'm not checking out for my own vanity.

RANDALL

Touche.

MAX

Give up, Randall. Anyway, you said it yourself, I only have "a little while longer."

RANDALL

But so much can happen in a little while. Remember when we were young and a week seemed like forever?

MAX

But I'm not young and I want out of my miserable life...before I do any more damage.

RANDALL

All right. I'll play you for it.

Randall produces a deck of cards from his jacket pocket.

MAX

Cards?

RANDALL

You're a gambling man, right?

MAX

I've played a few hands in my time.

RANDALL

One hand. Five card draw. You win, the conversation ends right now and I'll take you with me.

MAX

No more tricks. No more...changing your mind.

RANDALL

You have my word.

MAX

How do I know you won't cheat?

RANDALL

Hey, I'm an angel.

MAX

There are no angels when it comes to poker.

RANDALL

Okay. The game is five card draw. Black fours and one-eyed jacks wild.

Randall deals two cards.

MAX

What do you think you're doing?

RANDALL

Beg your pardon?

MAX

You'll be begging for more than that if you don't shuffle that deck.

Randall extends the deck to Max with a smile.

RANDALL

You may do the honors.

Max takes the deck. He starts to shuffle the cards in front of Randall, but changes his mind and turns to his side—shuffling the deck out of Randall's (and the audiences') sight.

After he finishes shuffling Max offers the deck to Randall.

MAX

Cut the deck.

RANDALL

I trust you implicitly.

MAX

Cut the deck.

Randall reaches out to cut the deck.

RANDALL

Cut 'em thin, sure to win.

Max eyes him suspiciously.

RANDALL, cont.

You meet all kinds in my line of work.

Max separates the deck, allowing Randall to place the cards he has cut into the middle of the deck. He returns the deck to Randall.

MAX

Now you can deal. Wait a second. I know what happens if I win. What happens if you win?

RANDALL

You go home and live out the rest of your natural life.

MAX

That's it? I don't have to repent...or pray...or any of that crap.

RANDALL

You can even keep the five bucks you throw into the Salvation Army Pot outside The Times building every Christmas.

MAX

Deal the cards, sucker.

Before Randall has a chance to deal again, Max stops him by slapping a hand on his hand.

MAX, cont.

Hey, that looking into the future thing...you're not going to pull that one on me, are you?

RANDALL

I told you, I have to get special clearance. Besides, you shuffled the deck yourself.

MAX

All right, then.

Randall begins to deal very deliberately. He's obviously not adept at cards. Max's impatience grows as he watches Randall.

RANDALL

(dealing)

One for you. One for me. One for you. One for me. One for you. One for me. One for you. One for me. One for you. One for...

MAX

Five!!

Max reaches down and picks up his cards. As Max studies his cards he smiles. Randall studies his cards, then looks to Max and sees his delight.

RANDALL

Nice hand, eh?

MAX

A hand to die for.

RANDALL

How many cards would you like?

MAX

None.

RANDALL

I see. The dealer takes five.

Randall again begins to deal very deliberately. He again counts to himself, but this time he silently mouths the numbers as he counts out his five cards.

Are you quite through?

MAX

Yes.

RANDALL

He picks up his new cards and studies them.

Say, maybe we can throw some cash in the pot.

MAX

That won't be necessary.

RANDALL

Of course not.

MAX

Randall picks up his cards, studies them, and looks at Max.

We don't have to do this.

RANDALL

It's a little late to be bluffing.

MAX

I'm not bluffing. I'm giving you one last chance to change your mind. You don't want to go...not really.

RANDALL

We'll see about that.

MAX

Max smiles as he lays his cards on the bench.

A royal flush. I've waited my whole life for a royal flush. Now I can die a happy man.

MAX, cont.

Oooh, hearts. Very pretty.

RANDALL

MAX

Very sweet.

RANDALL

Max, let's forget the game. Please.

MAX

You're stalling.

RANDALL

No...I'm just trying to save you.

MAX

That's not your department. You gonna fold or what?

RANDALL

Not exactly.

Randall puts his cards on the bench with a smile.

RANDALL, cont.

Read 'em and weep. I've always wanted to say that. Five aces.

MAX

What are you talking about?

RANDALL

The ace of clubs, the ace of diamonds, a one-eyed jack, the four of clubs and the four of spades. That makes five aces.

MAX

Wild cards...damn. You play like my grandmother.

RANDALL

And a fine woman she is. She sends her regards, by the way.

MAX

I couldn't talk you into one more hand, could I?

RANDALL

I'm afraid not. Max...you won't be sorry. Believe me.

MAX

Screw you! Screw the insurance money! I'm going straight home and blowing my brains out.

RANDALL

You're not going to do that.

MAX

You don't know that.

RANDALL

You don't have a gun.

MAX

I was speaking metaphorically. And you can't stop me. You said so yourself.

RANDALL

That's right.

MAX

Great, then I'm out of here.

Max starts to leave, but stops.

RANDALL

What's wrong?

MAX

You...what's going to happen to you?

RANDALL

I guess I don't get that promotion. But it's not your concern.

MAX

Just out of curiosity, what was the promotion to?

RANDALL

Birth.

MAX

Birth?

RANDALL

Yeah, you know, instead of escorting people out, I get to escort them in.

MAX

I told you, you'll find someone else to save.

RANDALL

And I told you, it has to be you.

MAX

Because of Katherine Marie.

RANDALL

Yes. And someone else.

MAX

Someone else? Who? What are you talking about?

RANDALL

I can't tell you. I can only say it has something to do with the future...the very near future.

MAX

And you know what it is this time, don't you?

RANDALL

Yes...well...ah...I do. Only I can't say. But I promise you...you do this thing, you will be sorry.

After a moment, Max crosses to the bench and sits down.

MAX

Yeah, well, I'm already sorry.

RANDALL

You're not going to do it?

MAX

You won the card game. A bet's a bet.

RANDALL

Wow. Great. I can't believe it!

MAX

Don't get crazy on me.

RANDALL

Oh...ah...one other thing.

MAX

You're pressing your luck.

RANDALL

I know, but it's also part of the deal. It's a small thing really.

MAX

You said there was no repenting or praying involved.

RANDALL

Nothing like that.

MAX

(after a moment)

I'm listening.

RANDALL

It's simple, really. You have to live your life.

MAX

That's cryptic.

RANDALL

Thanks. I thought it was too.

MAX

Just what the hell does it mean?

RANDALL

It means you can't sleepwalk through what's left of your life.

MAX

It's the only way I can avoid hurting people.

RANDALL

You hurt yourself.

MAX

How? How did I hurt myself?

RANDALL

You didn't believe in yourself...in what you were...in what you are...in what you could be.

MAX

I don't have any "could be's" left.

RANDALL

But you do. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

MAX

You're one irritating son-of-a-bitch.

RANDALL

I think it comes with the job.

Max crosses to Randall and gets in his face.

MAX

I would love to smash you right in the mouth.

RANDALL

That sounds intriguing...if I could feel it. That's the gift, you see...of living...of dying. All the wonderful things we get to feel.

MAX

Frustration.

RANDALL

Joy.

MAX

Despair.

Compassion.

RANDALL

Hatred.

MAX

Love.

RANDALL

Cruelty.

MAX

Katherine Marie.

RANDALL

Max grabs Randall. He can't decide what to do with him once he has him. Finally he lets out a scream as he pushes Randall backward and onto the bench. Max turns away from Randall and, after a moment, begins to cry.

Randall gets up, crosses to Max and places a hand on his shoulder.

I just want out...heaven...hell...nothing. At least nothing would be...

MAX

Empty.

RANDALL

For me it would be peaceful.

MAX

It's not that easy. If I took you with me now the only thing you would leave behind would be the shell of who you are. Everything else...all the unresolved feelings you'll carry with you--wherever you go. Don't leave.

RANDALL

I'm afraid to stay.

MAX

So was I. But I wish I had...just a little while longer. (PAUSE) Go home. Call your son.

RANDALL

MAX

I told you...we don't speak.

RANDALL

That will change. Believe me.

Randall reaches into his pocket and removes the yellowed note Max had torn to pieces earlier.

RANDALL, cont.

I think you should keep this.

Max stares at the note as Randall extends it to him.

MAX

But I tore that...I mean, how did you...?

RANDALL

Don't ask.

Max takes the note. Randall turns to leave.

MAX

Where are you going?

RANDALL

I thought you might like your bench back.

MAX

It's too late. The damn sun is in the wrong place.

RANDALL

There's always tomorrow.

MAX

Randall, how do I begin?

RANDALL

You've already begun.

MAX

Will I see you again?

RANDALL

You know better than to ask that.

MAX

Oh...right...you need “special clearance.”

RANDALL

Well...I’ve got to go see about a promotion.

Randall exits, whistling. Max watches him go, then sits on the bench. As Max sits, trying to figure out how to continue he hears the ice cream truck off stage. He smiles. A second chance. He gets up and exits toward the sound of the truck. The lights dim slightly.

SCENE III The stage is empty for a few moments. As the lights come back up full a young man (wearing a jogging outfit) jogs in from stage right. He jogs to the trash can stage left and stops to catch his breath.

Max enters in a rush from stage right. He carries with him a brown lunch bag and his old throw pillow. He moves down right where he waves and whistles to get someone’s attention in the distance.

MAX

Sorry I’m late. Stay with daddy.

He points toward the bench as he moves to it.

I’m not going any where.

He sits and waves again.

Yes, yes, I see you. Be careful.

He continues to watch whoever he was waving to as he takes a sandwich from his bag. After a moment the young man moves over to the bench and sits. Max and the young man casually acknowledge one another.

YOUNG MAN

Hey.

MAX

Hey.

The young man smiles as he inhales deeply, looking at his surroundings.

YOUNG MAN

Hard to believe there was a foot of snow on the ground just last week.

MAX

(almost to himself)

That's New York in the spring...balmy one day, a blizzard the next.

Max waves again to someone in the distance.

MAX, cont.

Don't get too close to the water.

YOUNG MAN

Cute kid. Is she yours?

MAX

She's my grand-daughter. That's my son, Galen, with her.

YOUNG MAN

Ah yes, I see the resemblance. How old is your granddaughter?

MAX

Five...today.

YOUNG MAN

Ah, well, congratulations...I mean, happy birthday...to your granddaughter.

MAX

Thank you.

YOUNG MAN

What's her name?

MAX

Katherine Randall Kurtz. I like to call her Randi.

YOUNG MAN

Nice name. Is that a family name?

MAX

No.

YOUNG MAN

Someone you knew?

MAX

A couple of people I knew.

Max takes a bite from his sandwich, then glances to the young man.

MAX, cont.

Would you care for half of my sandwich?

YOUNG MAN

What kind of sandwich?

MAX

Peanut butter and jelly.

YOUNG MAN

Funny. I would have guessed fish sandwich.

MAX

I haven't had a fish sandwich in over five years. I almost had a bone get stuck in my throat.

YOUNG MAN

Yes...well, that can be a problem.

Max extends the sandwich toward the young man.

YOUNG MAN, cont.

Thank you.

The young man takes half of the sandwich, but doesn't take a bite. Instead he places his half of the sandwich on the bench next to him.

MAX

Have we met before?

YOUNG MAN

It's possible.

MAX

You seem strangely familiar.

YOUNG MAN

I get that a lot.

MAX

(looking to the sky)

Looks like it could rain later.

YOUNG MAN

It won't.

MAX

You're the weatherman on channel 4. That's where I've seen you.

YOUNG MAN

Nope.

The young man gets up and moves toward the water fountain.

MAX

Then how do you know it's not going to rain? Can you see into the future or something?

YOUNG MAN

Only if I get clearance.

MAX

What did you say?

The young man leans down to drink from the fountain.

MAX, cont.

(re: the fountain)

Oh, sorry, that thing hasn't worked in years.

The young man snaps his fingers and water comes out of the fountain. The young man takes a long drink, then looks up to Max with a smile.

MAX, cont.

Randall? Is that you, Randall?

YOUNG MAN

You got me.

MAX

My God! I don't believe it. I mean, look at you. You look...

YOUNG MAN

Great. I know. It came with the promotion.

MAX

Wow. Then everything worked out for you.

YOUNG MAN

Thanks to you.

MAX

It's so good to see you.

YOUNG MAN

You look happy.

MAX

Yeah. Who knew?

The young man smiles.

MAX, cont.

I've wanted to thank you, so many times, but didn't know how.

YOUNG MAN

You kept your part of the deal. That was enough.

MAX

The evening of the same day you left, Galen called me.

YOUNG MAN

I know.

MAX

Katherine Randall was born on March 27th , at 9:00pm.

YOUNG MAN

March 27th. Imagine that.

MAX

I was a grandfather...am a grandfather.

YOUNG MAN

Of course you are. I was there...just barely made it.

MAX

You were?

YOUNG MAN

My new job.

MAX

Right. You went from deaths to be births.

YOUNG MAN

Randi was my first case. By the way, that was very kind of you...naming her Randi.

MAX

Actually, I'm the only one who calls her that.

YOUNG MAN

Ah, yes, well she does look more like a Katherine.

MAX

I felt like I owed you...and I like the name.

YOUNG MAN

Your son didn't mind?

MAX

Not at all. Galen and I have grown very close.

Max waves off in his granddaughter's direction.

MAX, cont.

What are you doing here today? Slumming?

YOUNG MAN

Special assignment.

MAX

Wait. I bet I know who you're looking for. I passed a woman coming into the park... must have been at least a month overdue.

YOUNG MAN

That was Mrs. Rodriguez. She's not due for another two weeks. Twins.

MAX

Oh.

YOUNG MAN

I'm actually here in my former capacity.

MAX

Someone's going to die?

YOUNG MAN

Yes.

MAX

Why are you handling it?

YOUNG MAN

I put in a special request to take care of it. Thought it might make things...easier.

MAX

You mean, now that you look more like Robert Redford?

YOUNG MAN

You really think I look like Robert Redford?

MAX

Nah. But you look good.

YOUNG MAN

Max. I'm here for you.

MAX

For me?

YOUNG MAN

That's right.

MAX

No. This has to be a mistake.

YOUNG MAN

I'm afraid not.

MAX

God never makes a mistake?

YOUNG MAN

Not so you'd notice.

MAX

What would you call the platypus?

YOUNG MAN

A practical joke.

MAX

Well, there's nothing funny about you coming for me now.

YOUNG MAN

Listen, Max...old friend...this is hard on me too.

MAX

Hard on you? You're the one who got me to stick around in the first place.

YOUNG MAN

I thought you deserved a chance.

MAX

A chance at what?

YOUNG MAN

A chance for a little...you know...happiness.

MAX

And now that I've got it, it gets ripped away.

YOUNG MAN

You get to take all of this with you...these memories.

MAX

I can't touch my memories.

YOUNG MAN

Ah, but you can hold them.

MAX

Still trying to be clever, I see.

YOUNG MAN

That hurts.

MAX

You think this doesn't?

YOUNG MAN

Max. It's time.

MAX

But I feel great.

YOUNG MAN

That's the best time to go.

MAX

What if I just ignored you?

YOUNG MAN

That's been tried before.

Max turns away from the young man and closes his eyes.

MAX

You're not here.

YOUNG MAN

This won't work. Believe me.

MAX

I don't have to believe you. I don't even know you.

YOUNG MAN

Come on, Max, it's me...Randall.

MAX

I don't know that for sure. I don't recognize you.

YOUNG MAN

How could you not...ah...right...of course.

Max remains with his back to the young man and covers his ears.

MAX

I can't even hear you.

The young man smiles, then turns and starts to exit. He stops, remembering his half of the sandwich is still on the bench. He retrieves the sandwich and takes a bite as he exits.

MAX, cont.

(after a moment)

You still there?

He opens his eyes and peeks over his shoulder. Finally he turns around and crosses in the direction the young man exited to make sure he's gone.

MAX, cont.

Yes! It worked!

The old Randall enters from the opposite direction. He is finishing off the sandwich the young man exited with. Max has his back to Randall.

RANDALL

Not exactly.

Max spins around.

MAX

What are you trying to do...scare me to death?

RANDALL

That wasn't the plan.

He studies Randall for a moment, as if he's looking for some bit of hope that this might not be his time.

MAX

You're really not leaving without me, are you?

RANDALL

I can't.

MAX

I don't suppose you'd consider one more hand of cards. Five card stud. No wild cards.

RANDALL

No wild cards? What fun would that be?

MAX

By the way, I know you couldn't see into the future, but I've always wanted to ask...how did you get those five aces?

RANDALL

Just my lucky day. And yours.

MAX

Well, at least I'm glad it's you...I mean, the old you. It's more familiar.

Randall holds out his hand for Max to take.

RANDALL

Are you ready?

Max starts to take his hand, but hesitates.

MAX

Just give me a moment.

He looks off in the direction of his granddaughter and son. He smiles and waves in their direction. Finally he inhales deeply and looks toward the sky. He looks to Randall and smiles.

MAX, cont.

Okay. Let's do this.

Randall places a hand on Max's shoulder.

MAX, cont.

Let me know when it's over.

RANDALL

It's done.

MAX

That's it? No pain?

RANDALL

Like I said...I've got connections.

MAX

What about the tunnel...or the white light...or my entire life passing in front of me?

RANDALL

Sequels are never as good as the original.

MAX

The second Godfather movie wasn't bad.

RANDALL

You like movies?

MAX

Mostly old movies.

RANDALL

Me too.

MAX

Randall...where we're going...will we see...Katherine Marie?

RANDALL

I'm afraid not.

MAX

Where is she then?

RANDALL

Where she belongs...here, preparing to offer herself to another lost soul looking for that one true love.

MAX

Preparing herself?

Randall points off toward Max's granddaughter.

RANDALL

Katherine Randall is five, right?

MAX

You know that. You were there.

RANDALL

Of course. Does she ever seem older to you?

MAX

She does seem to have an old spirit about her.

RANDALL

Yes. And she smells of lavender.

MAX

Now that you mention it...

After a moment.

MAX, cont.

Wait a moment. You don't mean that Katherine Randall is actually...

RANDALL

Katherine Marie? Not exactly, but she does carry a piece of her.

MAX

God, it that's true, I hope she doesn't have to suffer the heartache I caused her.

RANDALL

Or the disappointment I inflicted.

MAX

Maybe I shouldn't go just yet.

RANDALL

I told you, Randi will be fine.

MAX

You know that for sure? Oh...wait...I get it. You got special clearance and you've seen Randi's future?

RANDALL

Nah, just betting on one of God's rules...“the third time's a charm.”

MAX

What...that's like some 11th commandment?

RANDALL

It's...ah...in the new testament...code...you know how the Bible is written in code.

MAX

You're making this up.

RANDALL

Yep.

They both smile toward Katherine Randall together for a few moments. This time, Max throws an arm around Randall to comfort him.

MAX

Hey , where I'm headed, do I get a room of my own?

RANDALL

It's a little crowded for that.

They move toward the stage right exit.

MAX

So I get a roommate?

RANDALL

Something like that.

MAX

I pity the poor sucker who gets me.

RANDALL

Why's that?

MAX

I'm pretty hard to live with.

RANDALL

To die with.

MAX

Oh...right. To die with. So, any ideas who I'm going to get?

Randall smiles and mimes dealing a deck of cards. Max realizes what that means.

MAX, cont.

You...and me? For eternity?

RANDALL

It looks that way.

MAX

You think it will work?

RANDALL

It better.

They start to exit.

MAX

You know what, pal. I wouldn't have it any other way.

They exit with their arms around each other. Left on the bench are Max's small pillow and the empty brown paper bag. The lights fade.

THE END