

**FUNERAL IN THE RAIN**

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**SYNOPSIS**

Two actors. Eleven characters. One life.

**CHARACTERS**

**WOMAN** (plays Doris, Mildred, Flo, Enid and Heidi)

**MAN** (plays Rev. Bramblatt, Laird, Roland, Orvil, Nick and Dr.Pruitt)

**SETTING**

A cemetery on a rainy day

**AT RISE:** The sound of rain. Distant thunder. There are eleven different umbrellas open and spread across the stage. Each umbrella is specific to one of the characters. The **MAN** and **WOMAN** go to the specific umbrella and pick it up when portraying each character. They may also don a small costume piece (such as a pair of glasses or hat) to represent each character. **MAN** and **WOMAN** enter. **WOMAN** is **DORIS**, a middle-aged woman. **MAN** is **ORVIL**, an old man.

**WOMAN** (as **DORIS**)

It would have to rain today—of all days. Three sunny days in a row, then a downpour.

*(MAN becomes ORVIL, an old man.)*

**MAN** (as **ORVIL**)

It's been raining since dawn. When I woke up, I could hear the rain—beating hard on the roof. Like “cats and dogs” we used to say.

**WOMAN** (as **DORIS**)

All those people trampling mud all over my clean carpets.

**MAN** (as **ORVIL**)

And as I lie there listening to the rain, I thought “All of heaven is weeping...weeping for Esther Cavanaugh.”

*(MAN becomes LAIRD, DORIS's teen-aged son. Always texting.)*

**WOMAN** (as **DORIS**)

Laird! Laird! Laird?

**MAN** (as **LAIRD**)

What do you want, Ma?

**WOMAN** (as **DORIS**)

What are you doing?

**MAN** (as **LAIRD**)

Why do you need to know?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Did you bring the car around like I told you to do?

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

Why?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Because it's pouring rain and we're going to my Aunt Esther's funeral, remember?

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

Why do I have to go?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

This isn't *Jeopardy!*, Laird, you don't have to answer all my questions in the form of a question!

*(Church bells. MAN is now REV. BRAMBLATT.)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

Family and friends, we are gathered here today to commit to the earth, the bodily remains of Esther Cavanaugh. How pleased she would be to see so many familiar faces who braved the rain to be here today.

*(WOMAN is now FLO, a funeral crasher.)*

**WOMAN** (as FLO)

Don't tell anyone, but I never knew Esther Cavanaugh. But I like going to funerals. You usually get a free lunch out of the deal.

*(MAN is now DR. PRUITT, family physician.)*

**MAN** (as DR. PRUITT)

As a doctor, I don't usually attend the funerals of my patients. It's like admitting defeat, like I have failed. And as a doctor, being seen at a funeral is not good for business either.

**WOMAN** (as FLO)

And when you're on a fixed income, a few free meals a week makes a social security check go a lot further. I read the obituary page first thing in the morning—and I pick one that looks promising for a good meal.

**MAN** (as DR. PRUITT)

But I was their family doctor. When I started my practice, Esther and her family were among my first patients... So I felt obligated to here today. Plus, the way it's raining this morning, I'd never been able to golf today anyway.

**WOMAN** (as FLO)

The obituary is also good for picking up a few details. Like if someone asks me how I know the deceased, I'm ready. Oh, and I always put a few plastic bags in my purse—for leftovers. Not for me. For my Bootsie, my siamese. No point in letting perfectly good food go to waste, is there?

**MAN** (as DR. PRUITT)

Rev. Bramblatt always does a fine job. Treated him once for the worst case of gall stones I ever saw...

**WOMAN** (as FLO)

This minister always gives an excellent eulogy. By the time he's finished, I really feel like I knew the person—which, of course, I don't. So it's like free entertainment AND a meal.

*(MAN is again REV. BRAMBLATT)*

**MAN** (as REV BRAMBLATT)

Esther Dix Cavanaugh was a loving wife, mother, aunt, respected teacher and devoted friend...

*(WOMAN is now HEIDI, a woman in her thirties.)*

**WOMAN** (as HEIDI)

Talk about intelligent. Mrs. Cavanaugh knew everything about literature. Especially Shakespeare. He was her favorite. She could recite almost all his sonnets.

*(MAN is now NICK, a man in his forties.)*

**MAN** (as NICK)

Esther couldn't pronounce the word. "cinnamon." I discovered that when she taught me how to bake an apple pie. She also admitted that she couldn't say "aluminum" either.

*(WOMAN is DORIS again.)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Aunt Esther was the only person I knew who could touch her nose with her tongue.

*(MAN is LAIRD again. Still texting.)*

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

She could do what?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Touch her nose with her tongue.

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

That's gross.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

You didn't think so when you were a baby. If you were really fussy, seeing her do that was the only thing that stopped you from crying.

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

No wonder I'm maladjusted...

*(WOMAN is now MILDRED, a church lady.)*

**WOMAN** (as MILDRED)

Nobody could make a Lady Baltimore cake like Esther. It was always her contribution to our church bake sales—and it was always the first thing to sell. People actually fought over who would get to buy it...right there in the vestibule of St. Mark's! And believe you me, she guarded that recipe with her life!

*(MAN is now ROLAND, director of the AIDS Crisis Center)*

**MAN** (as ROLAND)

Talk about Dolly Double Entendre! Mrs. C knew more dirty jokes than anyone. And I know drag queens, honey!

*(WOMAN is again FLO)*

**WOMAN** (as FLO)

Good. There's lots of other old people here. I'll just blend in with them. Us old people are invisible nowadays.

*(MAN is now REV. BRAMBLATT)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

Esther was born and raised and spent her whole life here in our town. She spent her childhood in the West End.

*(WOMAN is now ENID, an elderly friend of ESTHER's)*

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

I can't remember a time when I didn't know Esther. We grew up across the street from each other. Hard to believe now, but back then we were all pig tails and long legs with scabby knees. Two little girls who jumped rope and played hopscotch. Esther loved hopscotch...couldn't get enough of it. Folks used to say Esther and I were "attached at the hip" because you never saw one of us without the other. Here's the funny thing. My maiden name was "Cox;" hers was "Dix." So people would always say "Look, there's Cox and Dix" or "Have you seen Cox and Dix?" Used to break people up. The boys especially. Of course, I came from a very sheltered home, so I had no idea what they were laughing about. I assumed they were just happy to see us. Didn't understand the joke until I was sixteen years old. Come to think of it, Esther was the one who explained it to me!

When it was time to start school, Esther and I skipped off hand-in-hand. To our horror, we were assigned to Miss Dover...the oldest, meanest spinster school teacher in the whole school!

*(MAN is ORVIL.)*

**MAN** (as ORVILL)

The first time I saw Esther was when I walked into Miss Dover's first grade class.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

All the kids called her Miss Bendover, because she had a huge wooden paddle...that she wasn't afraid to use.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Esther was sitting in a desk near the back of the room. Just at that moment, a sunbeam came through the window. She looked up at me as she was bathed in this pool of light. She was beautiful. It was like she glowed. I thought...I thought she was...an angel. I'll never forget it. I think I fell in love with Esther at that very moment.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

There was this creepy kid named Orvil who was always following Esther and me around.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I wanted to talk to Esther, but she was always hanging around that bossy Enid Cox.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Oh my God. I think that's him.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

That's her...that's Enid.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Orvil, is that you?

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Yes, Enid, it's me.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Such a sad day...

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

That it is...

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

*(Under her breath)*

Creep

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

*(Under his breath)*

Bitch.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Let me tell you what creepy Orvil did back in first grade.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I couldn't think of any way to get Esther to notice me. So one day a group of the boys dared me to do something...

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

When the bell would ring for recess, we would all go through the cloakroom...yes, that's what Miss Dover called it. A cloakroom. Probably because they still wore cloaks in her day. We would go through the cloakroom and down a metal fire escape to the playground.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

The boys dared me to put my head between two of the steps on the fire escape stairs. That seemed easy enough. And when Esther saw that I wasn't afraid to accept the dare...well, maybe she would notice me.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Esther and I were jumping rope when one of the boys came running and said, "Come quick...you won't believe what stupid Orvil has done!"

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

It was easy enough sliding my head in between the step on the fire escape...but then I couldn't get it back out. I think my ears were caught. I was stuck.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

There was Orvil...halfway up the fire escape. His head wedged between two of the steps. What would possess a person to do such a thing?

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

No matter how hard I tried, my head wouldn't budge. A crowd was beginning to gather. I couldn't see them...but I could hear them.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Then the bell rang to tell us recess was over. None of us were going to be late and face the wrath—or the paddle—of Miss Bendover

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

The kids actually climbed over me to get up the fire escape stairs. Someone even stepped on my hand.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

So we all took our seats...all except Orvil, that is. No one was brave enough to tell old Bendover that he had his head stuck in the fire escape. We were terrified she'd punish all of us. So we kept our mouths shut! Miss Dover didn't notice Orvil was missing—at first. We went through spelling, then onto to social studies...

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

After recess, it got awfully quiet on the playground. I called for help a few times, but no one came...

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Suddenly, Miss Dover asked, "Where's Orvil?" Silence. I mean, you could've heard a pin drop.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I started to wonder what would happen if I was stuck there all day...or all night...or the rest of my life!

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Again, she asked, "Where's Orvil?" By this point, not only were we too afraid to speak, we were too afraid to breathe! Then she said, "Well, I guess we'll all just sit here all day until I get an

answer!” After what seemed like an eternity, Esther was the only one in the class to slowly put up her hand. Bendover said, “Yes, Esther?” Esther stood. “Orvil got his head stuck in the fire escape.” A look of disbelief came over Bendover’s face. “You’d better not be making this up, young lady, or you’ll be meeting the Board of Education.” Esther didn’t flinch. “I am telling the truth, Miss Dover. Look for yourself.”

So Bendover went out through the cloakroom and looked down the fire escape.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

At last I heard Miss Dover’s voice. “Orvil, what are you doing down there?” “I’m not doing anything, Miss Dover. My head is stuck.” The school janitor had to use the jack from his car to pry the steps open wide enough to free me. I had divots on the sides of my head for a month—just about as long as Miss Dover suspended my recess privileges.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

I ask you what kind of idiot puts his head between the steps of a fire escape?

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

It wasn’t until much later that I found out Esther was the one who had saved me that day.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

That’s just how Esther was—always coming to the rescue of stray animals and fools!

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Esther really was my angel.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Esther started getting these home-made valentines...unsigned. It went on for years.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I wanted to show my appreciation to Esther, so I began sending her valentines. There was never much money in my family, so I would make valentines out of things I could find...scraps of paper and cloth. But I never had the courage to sign my name.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

It hit me...I said to Esther. “Look, they always say ‘valentines.’ Not valentines. What half-wit says ‘valentines.’?” Then it happened. I was walking down the hall and I heard it...

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Happy Valentine's Day, Enid.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

I couldn't wait to tell Esther that creepy Orvil was her secret admirer. But it didn't bother her. No matter how much I teased her. Esther took it all in stride. She was just like that.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Did I tell Esther was smart, too? She could name all the state capitals...alphabetically... backwards! She'd start with Trenton, New Jersey and end up with Albany, New York. Smartest girl in the class!

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

People used to say that Esther was the smartest girl in the class. Truth was, she was the smartest person in the class. She has the highest grades of anyone, bar none. But when it was time for graduation, the school board didn't want her to be valedictorian.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Our school had never had a woman valedictorian...ever. Back then, those things mattered—not like today. But I say, if you earned it, you earned it. Shouldn't matter if you're a boy or a girl.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

When Esther got wind of the fact they might not allow her to valedictorian, she marched right into the principal's office and—with the same courage she showed back in Bendover's class—she said that no one was going to stop her from being class valedictorian.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

And Esther made history that year. The school has had female valedictorians since then...but she was the first.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

And she got them back on graduation day. She ended her speech by saying, "And I leave you today with the words of poet Ogden Nash who said, 'I have an idea that the phrase *weaker sex* was coined by some woman to disarm some man she was preparing to overwhelm.'"

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

How we all cheered for Esther that day. She was really something.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

The summer after graduation, Esther and I got jobs at the old Strand Theater down on Central Avenue. I think it's a parking lot now. Esther sold tickets and I ran the concession stand. The owner was Mr. Handel—"Handsy Handel" as we called him because he was always trying to get a free feel...if you know what I mean. *From Here to Eternity* was the big seller that summer. Everyone wanted to see Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr kissing on the beach. And, of course, my favorite, the dreamy Montgomery Clift. We were packing them in that summer at the Strand.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I think I saw *From Here to Eternity* twelve times that summer...just so I could buy a ticket from Esther. I liked the way her soft fingers brushed lightly across my palm when she handed me my change.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

One rainy Sunday afternoon, we were particularly busy. "Handsy" was running around like a chicken with its head cut off. He was so preoccupied with the crowds that he didn't even try to put his paws on my behind when I bent over the popcorn machine. "Handsy" was afraid Esther had oversold the matinee and that they wouldn't be enough seats. He told her not to let anyone else through the door until he did a seat count.

That's when it happened.

Kenny Cavanaugh walked up to Esther's ticket window.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I never liked that Kenny Cavanaugh...

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

He was gorgeous. Dark, wavy hair. Piercing green eyes. And shoulders so broad it looked like the hanger was still in his coat. And charming...that man could talk birds out of the trees...

Esther said he was just so cute, she had to let him in the movie, no matter what "Handsy" said. Kenny saw the movie and afterwards drove us both home in his white-and-aqua two-toned Studebaker.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Now I hated that Kenny Cavanaugh.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Six months later, Esther and Kenny were married. It was a rainy day then, too—not like today. Just some sprinkles. It was an old wives’ tale that rain on your wedding day meant good luck.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

Hidden by my umbrella, I stood across the street from St. Mark’s and watched Esther go into the church. She was beautiful all in white.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

I was the maid-of-honor in their rainbow wedding.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

On the other hand, Enid looked like a giant cotton candy in that stupid pink dress.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

If only we knew then what we know now.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I knew that Kenny Cavanaugh was no good. Someone should have warned Esther...

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Turned out Kenny was—what we called in those days—a cad. And no amount of rain on Esther’s wedding day was going to change that.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I should have warned her...

*(WOMAN is DORIS.)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

My mother claimed that Uncle Kenny began cheating on Aunt Esther during their honeymoon. She also said Uncle Kenny went through life with an open fly. The only time it was closed was when he was lying in his coffin.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I would see him out all the time—with other women. It made me so mad. I wanted to punch him square in the face.

*(WOMAN is again MILDRED, the church lady.)*

**WOMAN** (as MILDRED)

Esther's husband Kenny used to accompany to her St. Mark's...until that unfortunate incident with that Bathsheba of a church organist. After that, Esther attended services alone.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

How could he do that to a wonderful woman like Esther? I would never have cheated on her!

*(WOMAN is ENID again.)*

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

I remember the first time Kenny cheated on Esther. Actually, it wasn't the first time. It was the first time he got caught. There was a knock at my door late one night. It was Esther. I put the coffee on and she told me what had happened. I said, "Leave the bastard." She said she couldn't. I asked her why. She was nearly finished with her teaching certificate. And that's when she told me she was pregnant. I think she thought having a baby would change Kenny. It didn't.

*(MAN is REV. BRAMBLATT)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

Esther was a devoted mother to her only child—her son Chip.

*(WOMAN is now DORIS.)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

From the beginning, my cousin Chip was different. For starters, he was always so clean. I mean, my brothers, the twins Roy and Ray—who, by the way, were "too busy" to come to their aunt's funeral today—were always dirty. They were constantly covered in mud or grass stains or blood. Not Chip. Clean as a whistle. He was also the only boy I knew who had any interest in playing with my Barbie dolls.

*(MAN is LAIRD.)*

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

*(Reading what he is texting)*

OMG...she's telling that Barbie doll story again...

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Chip and I spent hours dressing and redressing Barbie, Midge and Skipper, getting them ready to leave Barbie's Dream House and go off in her convertible.

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

What kind of guy plays with dolls?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Just a few years ago, you were playing with a G.I. Joe...

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

That's different...

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

How is it different?

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

Because...well, because...it just is.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Chip became the sister I never had. We spent hours in my bedroom playing 45's on my portable phonograph.

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

You played what on...on what?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

I could tell Chip anything. And he could tell me anything. And we kept each others' secrets. But one day, Chip couldn't keep his secret any longer.

It was Thanksgiving. We must have been about sixteen or so. Aunt Esther, Uncle Kenny and Chip came to our house for dinner. God knows why because my mother was a terrible cook.

Right in the middle of the meal as I was trying to choke down some of the driest turkey in all creation, Chip said, “Could you pass the salt? Oh, and by the way, everybody, I’m gay.”

There was the clatter of falling silverware. Uncle Kenny threw down his napkin and stormed out of the room. Aunt Esther cried a little. Then Chip said—and I’ll never forget it—Chip said, “No, keep it. I eat too much salt anyway..”

And we all started to laugh.

Aunt Esther loved Chip so much it didn’t matter to her that Chip was gay. Uncle Kenny was a different story. He was terrible to Chip. Called him...well, all kinds of terrible names. That’s when Aunt Esther decided to leave him. She told my mother, “It’s the last straw. I can tolerate the cheating—but I will not allow that man to hurt my son.”

*(MAN is ORVIL.)*

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I read in the newspaper that Esther was granted a divorce from that no-good Kenny Cavanaugh. I remember thinking...I wonder what took her so long?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Chip had a lot of boyfriends...but I only ever met one of them. What was his name again? It was so long ago...Nick...that was it...Nick.

*(WOMAN looks into the crowd of mourners.)*

I can’t be sure, but I think that’s him. That’s Nick.

*(MAN is NICK again..)*

**MAN** (as NICK)

I met Esther’s son Chip my senior year of college. Chip has just come back from a year in Europe, and we were both stuck in a freshman requirement that we put off taking for four years. It was impossible not to like Chip. He was just so...comfortable with himself. And he had a way of making everyone around him feel the same way. I was kind of shocked when he asked me out on a date. I’d never been on a date before...with a guy, that is. But before I could stop myself, I said, “Sure.” Chip just had that kind of power over people. On our third date, he took me home to meet Esther. And she made me feel so welcome in her home. Right before we left, Esther hugged me and whispered in my ear, “A mother is only as happy as her saddest child. So let’s both make sure we do everything we can to make Chip happy.”

Chip was accepted to law school. I hadn't had the foresight to plan any further ahead than sleeping in the morning after graduation. So I just tagged along. Chip and I got an apartment near the campus. I worked part-time jobs—bartending, pumping gas, whatever. Esther would come by with groceries. Even if Chip was off studying in the library, she would hang out with me. She taught me how to cook. I wouldn't be able to boil an egg if it wasn't for her. Chip and I didn't have much, but we were happy. Esther even made up a nickname for us. She called us "Damaged Goods." Get it? "Chip." "Nick." "Damaged goods?"

Then Chip got sick. Really sick. And Esther and I worked even harder to keep him happy.

*(WOMAN is MILDRED, the church lady.)*

**WOMAN** (as MILDRED)

Suddenly—for some reason— Esther stopped coming to Sunday morning services at St. Mark's.

**MAN** (as NICK)

I think Esther and I always knew we couldn't win the war, but as Esther put it, "We weren't going to let him go with winning a few battles along the way." And we did win a few battles...and we did lose the war.

**WOMAN** (as MILDRED)

It wasn't until after Chip died that we found out how...ill...he was. Had we known, there was certainly something we as a congregation could have done for her. But there was so much shame and stigma in those days, you know, with...well, with what Chip had.

*(MAN is ORVIL.)*

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I went to the calling hours when Esther's son died. I saw her standing by the casket...she was stroking Chip's face.

*(WOMAN is ENID.)*

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Poor Esther was inconsolable. Even time can't heal a loss like that.

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

But I didn't know what to say to Esther...what words are there when a mother loses her only child? So I just signed the book and I left.

*(WOMAN is DORIS.)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Losing Chip...it was devastating for all of us. But especially Aunt Esther.

*(MAN is NICK)*

**MAN** (as NICK)

Before the casket was closed, Esther slipped Chip's college ring from his finger and gave it to me. She said I should have it because that's where we met...and that Chip loved me so much.

*(MAN holds up his hand to show the ring.)*

I've worn it every day since.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

The funeral was very difficult. For all of us.

**MAN** (as NICK)

I didn't think I'd see Esther again after that sad day.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

My mother and I would go and visit her every day. Aunt Esther wasn't eating...she wasn't sleeping.

**MAN** (as NICK)

But I was wrong. Esther still stopped by with groceries; we cried a lot about losing Chip. She was always there for me. I can't tell you how much that meant...and still means to me. Finally, I just had to tell her. "I appreciate all you've done for me, Esther. Especially since Chip died, there's really nothing that connects us anymore." She said, "Nothing that connects us anymore? Nick, you're my boy..."

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

We both knew Esther needed more help than either of us could give her. I'm talking "professional" help, if you know what I mean. The new crisis center seemed like a good place to start.

(*MAN is ROLAND, director of the AIDS crisis center.*)

**MAN** (as ROLAND)

I first met Mrs. C when she came to the crisis center. It was a difficult time for both of us. She had just lost her son Chip, and I was trying to get the crisis center up and running—which wasn't easy in those days. Back then AIDS was still considered an "urban" problem," so people in the suburbs thought they were immune. So there I was like Gloria Gloom telling those folks otherwise. Mrs. C would come in every day, all Weepy Wilma on my ass. Years later I would tell her that letting her crying on my shoulder all the time was to blame for the bursitis in my arm. One day at the center, we were short-handed, and I was all Betty Breakdown and in walks Mrs. C.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Going to the AIDS Crisis Center seemed to give Aunt Esther an outlet for her emotions.

**MAN** (as ROLAND)

I just didn't have the time or the energy that day for her Karen Crybaby routine. I said, "Mrs. C, you can cry later, but right now I need someone to answer this telephone." And she did it. Next day we put her to work in the kitchen. Day after that she's delivering meals. In a week she was Vera Volunteer. There wasn't anything that woman wouldn't do. She'd drive clients to appointments, visit those who couldn't get out, lick envelopes—whatever needed to be done. Pretty soon she spent less time being Tessa Tearful and more time being Helpful Hannah. Back then, some of our regulars had been turned away by their lovers or their families when they got sick. Mrs. C became "mom" to all of them. The two of us sat by many a sickbed...kept many a death watch...and we went to many a funeral. We cried a lot...and we laughed a lot.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

I think the Center saved her life.

(*MAN is now REV. BRAMBLATT.*)

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

Before joining our congregation at Good Shepherd, Esther spent many years as a faithful and active member of the parish at St. Mark's.

*(WOMAN is MILDRED.)*

**WOMAN** (as MILDRED)

I was there the day Esther left St. Marks. And I'll never forget it.

Esther and I had so much in common. We were lifelong members of St. Marks. My parents were married there; so were hers. We were both baptized and confirmed. We had our weddings there. We buried our parents there. Both Esther and I taught Sunday School, served on church council, sang in the choir and were members of the ladies guild. Let's face it, we were pillars of the church!

I went to Chip's service and told Esther how much we all missed her at church. She began attending regularly then.

That was about the time we got a new minister. It was his third or fourth week in the pulpit when he gave a very fiery sermon about...well, what Chip had. And how that was God's punishment for...well, what Chip was.

At that moment, Esther stood up. Right in the middle of the sermon. In reality, she wasn't much more than five feet tall. But that Sunday morning she looked like Goliath. She pointed her finger right at the minister. And in a voice that sounded like Moses telling Pharaoh, "Let my people go," she said, "Shame...on...you." Then she turned and walked out.

Esther never set foot in St. Mark's again. Not even for my son Joe's wedding.

In hindsight, I wished I'd followed her. I mean, disease isn't God punishment on people, right? My Cousin Lucretia has had MS for years, my late husband Vernon had cancer...were they being punished by God? I don't think so.

And by the way, it wasn't until years later when that same minister ran off to Mexico with that Jezebel of a church secretary that we found out he'd embezzled hundreds of thousands of dollars!

*(MAN is REV. BRAMBLATT.)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

For more than thirty years, Esther taught English at the high school, instilling in generations of students a love of reading and of literature...

*(WOMAN is again HEIDI.)*

**WOMAN** (as HEIDI)

Oh, Mrs. Cavanaugh instilled much more than that.. You see, I was the girl in high school that no one paid any attention to. The other girls ignored me; the boys avoided me. I didn't have any friends. I ate alone in the cafeteria. I was pretty much forced into being a loner. But in my senior year, I was assigned to Mrs. Cavanaugh's homeroom. In a just a few days, she caught on that I was the outcast of the class. So she started to give me little jobs to do. She'd say, "Heidi, could you do the lunch count for me today?" Or "Heidi, would you like to help me with this bulletin board." Like I said, it was just little things. But while I was filing papers for her or cutting out stencils for letters, we'd talk. She'd asked me questions about my family or my homework or...what boys I liked. And she listened. She was genuinely interested in what I had to say. Mrs. Cavanaugh was the first person to make me feel... special. At graduation she hugged me and told me how much she was going to miss me. And that in all her years of teaching, I was one of her favorite students. In that year, she changed me life.

*(MAN is ROLAND again.)*

**MAN** (as ROLAND)

I think being a teacher is what made Mrs. C such a great volunteer. She was a wonderful speaker—she'd been Vicky Valedictorian, you know. And she knew so many people. Like Kitty Connection. If the Center had to make contact with someone important like a county commissioner or a Congress representative, chances were Mrs. C had been his teacher. And if she wasn't, she was his wife's teacher or his son's teacher. We were forever playing "The Six Degrees of Mrs. C."

Mrs. C had another special gift, too. She just had a way of making you feel...important.

**WOMAN** (as HEIDI)

Not too long ago, I ran into Mrs. Cavanaugh at the supermarket. I was with my husband and our two little girls. There she was in the produce section. I went up to her. She was looking at a mound of tangelos.

"Hi, Mrs. Cavanaugh," I said, "You probably don't remember me." She looked up and said, "Why, Heidi! Of course, I remember you." I said to my husband, "This is Mrs. Cavanaugh, my favorite teacher in high school." Mrs. Cavanaugh said to me, "Please, Heidi...call me Esther." I said, "Oh, Mrs. Cavanaugh, I couldn't. You'll always be Mrs. Cavanaugh to me!"

Then she held up a tangelo and said, "Why am I looking at tangelos? I hate tangelos. They lack the courage to be real oranges."

Come to think of it, Mrs. Cavanaugh didn't look too good when I saw her

*(MAN is DR. PRUITT, ESTHER's physician.)*

**MAN** (as DR. PRUITT)

The most difficult part of being a family physician is when you have to break bad news. First, there was the news about Chip...then the news about Ken.

*(WOMAN is ENID)*

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

One day Kenny did come crawling back to Esther...when he was terminally ill and had nowhere else to go. God bless her, she took him back.

*(MAN is REV. BRAMBLATT)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

And Esther showed great compassion when—despite her divorce—she cared for her ex-husband through his final illness.

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

She rented a hospital bed and put it in her living room so she could take care of the no-good cheating bastard. I'm not that good a person. I would have said, "Have one of your whores take care of you!"

*(MAN is ROLAND.)*

**MAN** (as ROLAND)

I helped Mrs. C arrange for the hospital bed. I had always assumed her husband was already dead—she never mentioned him. And now she was going to be Nora Nursemaid for him.

*(WOMAN is DORIS)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Aunt Esther kept Uncle Kenny at home right up until the end. My mother used to say Aunt Esther was either the forgiving-est woman in the world...or the dumbest.

*(MAN is ORVIL.)*

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

I should have gone to Kenny Cavanaugh's funeral...for Esther's sake. But I didn't.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Very few people came to Uncle Kenny's funeral. And the people that did come, came for Aunt Esther's sake.

*(MAN is DR. PRUITT.)*

**MAN** (as DR. PRUITT)

Eventually, the day came when I had to give Esther the bad news about herself. Yes, there were treatments we could try, but even so, the prognosis wasn't good. She took the news rather stoically. She asked if she had time to get her affairs in order, then she thanked me and left the office. Next day, she showed up without an appointment and loaded down with medical books. In that one night, she learned more about her condition than I ever knew. Esther said she had made some decisions. First, she was refusing treatment. After watching how Chip and Ken had suffered, she didn't want to prolong her own agony. Second, she asked me to tell no one of her condition. I told her I couldn't...doctor/patient confidentiality, you know.

*(WOMAN is now DORIS)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

I didn't even know Aunt Esther was sick...why wouldn't she tell anyone?

*(MAN is now ROLAND)*

**MAN** (as ROLAND)

Hadn't heard from Mrs. C in a while. Just as I was about to pick up the phone, it rang. It was Mrs. C. She had a slew of new dirty jokes for me. Very Rachel Raunchy. We had some great laughs that afternoon. That Secret Sally never let on how sick she was.

It was the last time I spoke to her.

*(WOMAN is MILDRED)*

**WOMAN** (as MILDRED)

About a month ago, my doorbell rang. When I finally got to the door and opened it, there was no one there. Then I saw it. A box. Inside the box was the most beautiful Lady Baltimore cake I'd ever seen. Taped to the bottom of the cake plate...was the recipe. In Esther's own handwriting. And a note that read, "I wanted you to have this."

(*MAN is NICK*)

**MAN** (as NICK)

Remember how she couldn't say "cinnamon" and "aluminum"? Just the other day, my phone rang—very late at night. It was Esther. I thought something was wrong. She said that she just wanted to tell me something. Then, clear as a bell, she said, "Never put *cinnamon* on *aluminum*." She pronounced both words perfectly. "I've been practicing," she said. Then she laughed and hung up. It was the last time I spoke to her.

(*WOMAN is ENID*)

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

A few weeks back, I got a call from Esther asking me to come over. When I got to her house, she was around back on the patio. She said, "Do me a favor...play a game of hopscotch with me?" I thought she was joking. But then she stepped aside, there she had drawn a hopscotch court on the patio. I said, "Two old women playing hopscotch...there's a broken hip just waiting to happen." "Oh, please," she begged. So we played hopscotch. Esther won—as usual. Someone should have been there to film it for *America's Funniest Home Videos*—they could've won a fortune.

(*MAN is DR. PRUITT*)

**MAN** (as DR. PRUITT)

Didn't hear from her again until just the other day when she called and asked me to come by the house. Now, I haven't made a house call in thirty years. But I did it. For Esther. She knew she was near the end and wanted something for the pain. I told her she needed to be in a hospital, but she said she had made her peace with God and she wanted to die in her own bed...in the same house when Chip had died...and Ken. So I gave her an injection...and I went to the other room to call her niece Doris. When I returned Esther was mumbling something. Not long after that, she slipped away. Strange though. Right before she passed, she opened her eyes and said, "And the last one is Albany, New York." I have no idea what she meant by that.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

I was so shocked when Dr. Pruitt called to say Aunt Esther was dying. Wasn't I Laird? Laird?

*(MAN is now LAIRD. He is texting)*

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

What?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Weren't we shocked to hear about Aunt Esther?

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

No. She *was* like a hundred years old, right?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Oh, shut-up...and stop texting.

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

Whatever...

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Like I'm not upset enough today as it is...

*(MAN is REV. BRAMBLATT)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

Now one of Esther's former students, Heidi Gottlieb, will share with us some words from Esther's favorite writer...William Shakespeare.

*(Woman is now HEIDI)*

**WOMAN** (as HEIDI)

Sonnet 71...

No longer mourn for me when I am dead...

Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
 Give warning to the world that I am fled  
 From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell

Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
 The hand that writ it;

For I love you so  
 That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot  
 If thinking on me then should make you woe.

O, if, I say, you look upon this verse  
 When I perhaps compounded am with clay,  
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse.  
 But let your love even with my life decay,

Lest the wise world should look into your moan  
 And mock you with me after I am gone.

*(MAN is LAIRD...still texting.)*

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

Man, I have like no idea what that means....

*(WOMAN is DORIS)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Maybe if you spent more time studying and less time texting, you'd learn something.

*(MAN is REV. BRAMBLATT)*

**MAN** (as REV. BLAMBLATT)

As Psalms 31:10 reminds us, "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her worth is far above rubies." In Esther Cavanaugh we have all found a woman whose worth was far above rubies.

*(As each character says his or her good-bye, he or she goes to the graveside. WOMAN is now HEIDI.)*

**WOMAN** (as HEIDI)

Thanks for everything, Mrs. Cavanaugh.

*(Closes umbrella. MAN is now DR. PRUITT.)*

**MAN** (as DR. PRUITT)

Godspeed to you, Esther.

*(Closes umbrella. WOMAN is now MILDRED.)*

**WOMAN** (as MILDRED)

We already missed you at St. Mark's...we'll miss you even more now.

*(Closes umbrella. MAN is ROLAND.)*

**MAN** (as ROLAND)

The crisis center just won't be the same without you, Ms. C.

*(Closes umbrella. WOMAN is ENID.)*

**WOMAN** (as ENID)

Don't worry, Esther. One day—soon—Cox and Dix will be together again.

*(Closes umbrella. MAN is NICK.)*

**MAN** (as NICK)

Esther, please tell Chip I still miss him. And that I think of him every day.

*(Closes umbrella. WOMAN is now DORIS.)*

**WOMAN** (sotto voce as DORIS)

Laird...Laird...

**MAN** (as LAIRD, texting)

What now, Ma?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

What did I tell you about texting?

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

I give up...what did you tell me?

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Say “good-bye” to Great Aunt Esther.

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

Later, Esther.

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

You were more than an aunt to me, Esther. You were like my second mom. Rest in peace.

*(Closes umbrella. MAN is REV. BRAMBLATT.)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

One final announcement...

*(WOMAN is FLO, the funeral crasher.)*

**WOMAN** (as FLO)

Please don't tell me I have stood here in the pouring rain for half-an-hour and there's not going to be a free lunch?

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

Immediately following the final prayer, there will be a luncheon—

**WOMAN** (as FLO)

Score!

*(Closes umbrella)*

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

-- at the home of Esther's niece Doris Moore. Let us pray.

*(WOMAN is DORIS.)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Dear God, don't let all these people show up. I don't have nearly enough food.

**MAN** (as REV BRAMBLATT)

And now, Heavenly Father, we commend to you the body of your faithful servant Esther Cavanaugh. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.

*(Church bells)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Did I remember to dust on top of the refrigerator?

**MAN** (as REV. BRAMBLATT)

Amen. Go in peace.

*(Closes umbrella)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

I hate the thought of all these strangers using my toilet! C'mon, Laird, we've got to get home.

*(MAN is LAIRD—still texting.)*

**MAN** (as LAIRD)

Why are you rushin' me?

*(Closes umbrella)*

**WOMAN** (as DORIS)

Because we've got to put down some plastic before all these muddy people ruin my carpet!

*(WOMAN closes her umbrella and exits quickly. MAN is ORVIL.)*

**MAN** (as ORVIL)

All of life I've loved her. From the first day I laid eyes on her back in Miss Dover's class—when I saw her in that beam of sunlight. I always swore that one day I would tell her. Now, it's too late. But I'm going to go ahead and say it anyway. I love you, Esther. Can you hear me? I've always loved you.

*(A shaft of sun breaks through the clouds, putting the MAN in a pool of light. MAN puts out his hand and realizes it's not raining. He closes his umbrella. Smiles.)*

Well, what do you know about that...

*(MAN exits. Lights fade to black.)*