

# **The Big Sneeze**

**(or Much Achoo About Nothing)**

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A One-Act Play

by

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## **Synopsis**

*The Big Sneeze (or Much Achoo About Nothing)* is a romantic comedy that attempts to answer the question: Can a fractured rib mend a broken heart? A backstage romance between assistant stage manager Pam and Touchstone, played by Larry, seems to be brewing. But Larry is nervous, and a backstage sneeze only makes matters worse. A disastrous pickleball match, a wedding toast gone awry, and two visits to the hospital are all that stand in the way of true love.

## **Cast of Characters**

BARB	Stage Manager, Female, 50ish, any race
PAM	Assistant Stage Manager, Female, 30ish, any race
LARRY	Touchstone, Male, 30ish any race
RITA	Nurse, Female, 50ish, any race, can double with BARB

## **Setting**

Backstage at a community theater production of *As You Like it*, pickleball court, emergency room, wedding reception hall. All locations can be suggested with a bare minimum of set pieces.

## **Time**

June, present day. One evening and the following day and evening.

## **Production History**

Production, Authentic Community Theatre, Hagerstown, MD, 2024

Staged Reading, Dominion Stage, Arlington, VA, 2025

## Scene One

*Dimly lit backstage. BARB and PAM are both dressed in black and wearing headsets for communication. BARB may be carrying a clipboard.*

BARB

Where's Touchstone? Has anyone seen Touchstone?!

PAM

I think he's in the john.

BARB

What?! There's less than three minutes to places!

(BARB heads toward the toilet and runs into LARRY coming from the opposite direction dressed in pantaloons, billowy top, and a fool's cap.)

BARB

There you are! What were you doing in there?

LARRY

Taking a leak if you must know.

BARB

Fly check.

LARRY

You wish. There's no fly.

BARB

Did you wash your hands?

LARRY

Yes, mother.

BARB

They say you should hold a nervous pee.

LARRY

Sure, Barb. Next time I'll let you hold it for me.

BARB

You wish!

(BARB exits laughing.)

(LARRY, who is initially somewhat shy around PAM, nervously steals glances at her as she is checking her script, props, etc.)

PAM

Everything OK, Larry?

LARRY

Sure, Pam. Fine. Just a little stage fright, I guess.

PAM

You? Cool, calm Larry?

LARRY

That's not very alliterative.

PAM

I beg your pardon?

LARRY

Alliterative. Alliteration. It's when you repeat a sound for emphasis.

PAM

I know what alliteration is. I'm not sure what it has to do with anything.

LARRY

It's just that you described me as cool, calm Larry, which by the way is really nice. Is that what you think of me?

PAM

I'm in the process of reevaluating.

LARRY

Anyway, if you had used words that started with "L" to describe me...

PAM

Laughable, lugubrious...

LARRY

Of course, alliteration can be overdone.

PAM

I'm just teasing. Hey, break a leg tonight.

LARRY

By the way, are we on for pickleball tomorrow?

PAM

Yes, if you don't mind. My partner is still recovering from a sprained ankle.

LARRY

I was surprised you asked me.

PAM

Well, you weren't my first choice. Bob is out of town. Dave said it was too early in the morning, Barb just laughed.

LARRY

And that left me. Feels like I'm back in high school gym class.

PAM

Aww. I'm glad it's you. But are you sure you want to? Tomorrow's kind of hectic with Mark and Lisa's wedding and closing night.

LARRY

I don't think a wedding should be too strenuous.

PAM

Did you forget you're the best man? Do you have a speech prepared?

LARRY

"As the ox hath his bow, sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires; and as pigeons bill, so wedlock would be nibbling."

PAM

I was thinking something a little more personal.

LARRY

Don't worry. I'm a technical writer after all. I have it mapped out. I just need to fill in some details. I'll run it by you tomorrow at pickleball.

PAM

I expect you to be concentrating on the match.

(BARB enters.)

BARB

Places people.

LARRY and PAM

Thank you, places.

(LARRY starts pacing and rubbing his nose.)

LARRY

Tissue! Tissue!

BARB

Is that some new vocal exercise?

LARRY

No! I have to sneeze!

(PAM holds out a box of tissues, but BARB pushes it away.)

BARB

Don't sneeze! They'll hear you!

LARRY

I can't... help it... my nose itches...

BARB

Then scratch it!

(LARRY starts running around scratching his nose.)

LARRY

It's... not... helping! Ha... ha... ha...

(He produces a little squeak as he stifles the sneeze and doubles over in pain. He wants to scream but BARB shushes him.)

PAM

Oh my god! What was that?

LARRY

I sneezed!

PAM

It was so cute! A little squeak! Pi-choo!

BARB

Pi-choo!

(BARB and PAM giggle.)

LARRY

I was holding it in. Can't you tell I'm in agony?!

PAM (*still giggling*)

I'm sorry. Can you go on? Should we stop the show?

BARB

We're not stopping the show!

LARRY

Help me straighten up.

BARB

I can send Jimmy on with a book.

LARRY

He's an usher and he's 12 years old!

BARB:

He looks older. He's very good. Last Halloween he was Hamlet walking around with Yorik's skull.

LARRY:

Alas, poor Yorick. I pity the fool. I'll give him a belated Kit Kat. I'm going on.

PAM

You don't have to do this. I'm worried about you.

LARRY (*honestly touched*)

Really?

PAM

Of course, silly.

BARB

I hate to break up this little love match...

LARRY and PAM (*ad-libbing*)

Love? Who said anything about love? Don't be crazy!

BARB

Fine. What's it gonna be Larry? Are you OK or do I hold the show and get Jimmy ready.

LARRY

I can do this.

(LARRY exits.)

BARB

Pi-choo! (*She giggles.*)

PAM

Shh!

(Brief BLACKOUT and End of Scene.)

## Scene Two

*The sound of applause is heard just prior to lights coming up.*

*The setting is the same with only PAM backstage. LARRY comes offstage at the conclusion of the play, waiting for curtain call.*

PAM

You were brilliant! I would never have guessed you were in pain!

LARRY

I feel great! Must be the adrenaline.

PAM

I'm so... happy for you.

LARRY

Thank you, Pam. I just want to say...

PAM

Save it. Get out there and let the audience adore you.

(He exits. Sound of applause and then a scream of agony.)

(LARRY returns doubled over.)

PAM

Oh my god! What happened?

LARRY

Everything was fine and then we all raised our arms for a company bow. They thought I was just howling with excitement.

PAM

This is not good. Maybe you should go to the hospital.

LARRY

No. I don't like hospitals.

I'll go with you. PAM

You'd go with me? LARRY

(BARB enters.)  
Where are we going? BARB

To the hospital. PAM

I hate hospitals. BARB

I'm fine. Really. I'm feeling much better already. A good night's sleep and this will all be behind me. LARRY

Larry, if she wants to take you to the hospital, you should let her take you to the hospital. BARB (*trying to impart wisdom*)

I think I can handle this on my own. LARRY

Don't be too sure. BARB

(She exits.)

I don't know what she's thinking. Thank you, Pam. I appreciate the offer, but I'm gonna head home. LARRY

Are you sure? Maybe we should skip pickleball. PAM

Don't be silly. I wouldn't miss that for anything. I even bought a costume. LARRY

Outfit. PAM

Whatever. So I'll see you in the morning? LARRY

If you're sure... PAM

I'm sure. LARRY

(They stare at each other for an awkward moment, neither one sure what to say or do next.)

Ok then. Great show tonight. Get some rest. Good night. PAM

Night. Thanks. LARRY

(Another awkward moment between them. LARRY breaks the moment as he turns and exits. PAM's gaze follows him. She shakes her head.)

(BARB enters.)  
If you're still looking for someone to go to the hospital with... BARB

What? Oh! Ha! Uh, thanks. I better make it an early night. PAM

He likes you, you know. BARB

I know. PAM

So? BARB

PAM

He likes me. I like him. We're friends. Besides, I think he might be gay.

BARB

Well, I've never seen him at any of the places I hang out. None of the fellas have said anything about him. He's just a little awkward... around you anyway.

PAM

We're friends. Don't make it out to be more than it is.

BARB

I'm just sayin'... If *you* want to make it more than it is, next time you drag his ass to the hospital.

PAM

Next time? That's not likely.

(BLACKOUT and End of Scene.)

### Scene Three

*A pickleball court. The only set piece is a bench off to one side of the stage. LARRY enters in tennis whites carrying a paddle.*

LARRY

What am I doing? I don't think I slept more than five minutes at a stretch. My side was killing me. And I couldn't stop thinking about Pam. What a jerk I am. I could have gone to the hospital with her. Spent who knows how long in the waiting room together. She really seemed concerned about me. Or was it pity? I don't want her to pity me. But I am pitiful. I mean after all she offered to do for me, I can't believe I just walked out. Not even a "do you need a ride?" "Can I walk you to your car?" "Would you like to get a cup of coffee?" I'm sure she was just waiting for me to say something. Anything! She must think I'm a complete idiot.

(PAM has entered on this last line. She is also dressed in tennis whites and carrying a gym bag.)

PAM

Whoever she is, I agree.

(She removes her paddle and a towel from the bag.)

LARRY

Just talking to myself. Pay no attention.

PAM

Well, if there is someone, I'd certainly like to meet her.

LARRY

You'll be the first to know.

PAM

So, how are you feeling this morning?

LARRY

Better. Ready to make my debut on the pickleball field.

PAM

Court. I have to say, you look the part. Let's see if you're ready to be off book. Here come Tom and Marcie.

(These characters are represented by the audience.)

PAM

Tom, Marcie! This is my good friend, Larry. Larry, Tom and Marcie.

(LARRY mimes shaking hands and ad-libs greetings.)

PAM

Larry is a pickleball virgin, so please be gentle.

LARRY (*whispering*)

I thought the term was "rookie."

PAM

You're so easy to tease! OK, get ready now. I'll return the serve and then just be ready for anything.

(They get into position. PAM shifts her weight from side to side in anticipation. She swings to return the serve. LARRY moves up toward the "net" and swings. He and PAM both look back as if following the missed ball.)

LARRY

Sorry!

PAM

That's OK. You'll get the hang of it. I'll serve.

(She does. LARRY and PAM alternate a couple of successful returns.)

You catch on quick!

LARRY

This is actually kind of fun!

PAM

Tom just hit a huge lob! Go for the kill shot!

(LARRY runs up to the net, delivers an overhand smash, screams, and collapses to the ground.)

PAM

Larry, are you all right?!

LARRY

Nooo! My side!

PAM

Let me help you up.

(PAM lends LARRY a hand but he screams as he tries to stand and falls back down.)

(*To Tom and Marcie*) Don't worry guys. He'll be OK. He just had a big sneezing accident. It was actually kind of cute. Pi-choo!  
(*She giggles.*)

LARRY (*to Tom and Marcie*)

I'm sorry, guys. Another time, OK?

PAM

Sorry, Tom. I'll call you later, Marcie.

LARRY

They hate me, don't they?

PAM

Probably. This is all my fault. We should've just canceled. Let's get you to the hospital so you can get patched up in time for the wedding and closing night.

LARRY

The hospital? Do you think that's wise?

PAM

I suppose I can leave you lying here on the pickleball court and the next group can just play around you.

LARRY

I'd hate to be late for the wedding. I should probably just go home.

(PAM, hands on hips, stares at him for a moment.)

PAM

Have you talked to Barb since last night?

LARRY

Barb? No. Why?

PAM

Nothing. Come on. You're going to the hospital even if I have to drag your ass there.

LARRY

Wow! This is a side of you I've never seen before!

PAM (*sarcastic*)

You bring out the elementary school teacher in me.

(She helps LARRY to his feet and they begin to exit.)

LARRY

Should I be afraid?

PAM

One of us should be.

(PAM helps him offstage followed by a brief BLACKOUT and End of Scene.)

### Scene Four

*Emergency room. RITA is seated behind a desk. There are a few chairs to represent the waiting room.*

*LARRY and PAM enter still in their pickleball outfits.*

PAM

My friend needs to see a doctor, stat! He may have a broken rib!

RITA

Does your friend have a name and insurance? I need to see his insurance card, stat.

LARRY

I can speak. My name is Larry Little. My insurance card is in my wallet, which is in my pocket, which I can't reach.

PAM

I'll get it.

(She reaches into his front pocket. He jumps and shrieks in pain.)

LARRY

My *back* pocket!

PAM

I didn't know you were so sensitive. Here.

(She hands the wallet to LARRY who retrieves his insurance card.)

LARRY

Here you go.

RITA

Mr. Little, what seems to be the problem?

PAM

Isn't it obvious? He's in pain!

RITA

It's my job to look beyond the obvious. Mr. Little?

LARRY

I injured my side. I think I may have broken a rib.

RITA

Playing tennis?

PAM

Pickleball.

RITA

Pfft. People get injured playing pickleball?

PAM

It's harder than it looks.

LARRY

I aggravated an existing injury playing pickleball.

RITA

I'm almost afraid to ask, but what was the cause of the original injury.

PAM

He sneezed.

RITA

You did not disappoint. And when did this big sneeze occur?

PAM

It wasn't a big sneeze. It was a cute little... squeak! Like this. Pi-choo!

RITA

How adorable!

PAM

I know! Pi-choo!

(PAM and RITA share a laugh.)

LARRY

Excuse me. To answer your question, it occurred last night. At the theater.

RITA

The multiplex? What did you see?

LARRY

Not the movie theater. Live theater. I'm appearing in a production of *As You Like It* at Mindful Players.

RITA

Ah! You're an actor! (*To Pam*) You too?

PAM

Oh, no. I'm assistant stage manager.

RITA

I can believe that.

LARRY

Can we get back to my side? We have a wedding this afternoon.

RITA

Congratulations!

PAM

No no no. Not *our* wedding. We're just friends. (*To Larry*) Right, Lar?

LARRY

Oh, right. Friends.

PAM

He hasn't even tried to...

LARRY

Ooohhh!!!

RITA

So... about the sneeze...

LARRY

We were backstage. I had to sneeze, and I held it in.

RITA

You should never stifle a sneeze.

LARRY

Ha! Tell that to my stage manager!

(RITA looks to PAM.)

PAM

Not me. I'm just the assistant stage manager.

RITA

Well, I'm sure if you work hard you'll move up. (*Handing form to Larry*) I need you to fill this out, hon. You can have a seat over there.

(In this next sequence, RITA should be between the other two and watching the conversation go back and forth much like following a game of pickleball.)

LARRY

Thank you. You should go home and change for the wedding. I can get a cab back to my car.

PAM

No way I'm leaving you here alone.

LARRY

Really, I'll be fine. I've taken up enough of your day already.

PAM

It's no problem.

LARRY

I'm fine.

RITA

Heads she stays, tails she goes. (*Flips a coin*) Heads it is. The sooner you fill out the form, the sooner you can be on your way.

LARRY

Really, you don't...

RITA

Sit!

(LARRY and PAM take seats. LARRY begins to fill out the form.)

LARRY

I don't know why they need all this information for a rib injury.

(PAM takes a peek at the form.)

PAM

You certainly have a lot of allergies! Cats. Dogs. Hamsters?!

LARRY

Basically any creature with fur. I get a terrible rash.

PAM

You had surgery before?

LARRY

Yes, I had my wisdom teeth removed.

PAM

I don't think that's what they're looking for.

LARRY

I prefer to err on the side of caution.

PAM

This is a side of you I've never seen before.

LARRY

You bring out the hypochondriac in me. Done!

(LARRY and PAM both approach RITA who has been following the preceding with amusement.)

LARRY

(*Handing the form to RITA.*) Here you are.

RITA

(*Scanning the form.*) Wisdom teeth, huh? Lucky you're still with us. Take this and follow the signs to x-ray. (*To PAM*) You can wait here, hon. He shouldn't be long.

LARRY

Really, Pam, you don't have to...

RITA

Go!

(LARRY exits.)

PAM

Thank you. He can be so...

RITA

Annoying?

PAM

Sweet. I'm Pam, by the way.

RITA

(*Pointing to her name tag.*) Rita. Nice meeting you. You sure you two are just friends?

PAM

Of course. I mean I've thought about... I've wondered what if we...

RITA

And how was it? When you thought about it.

PAM

I don't see how that's any of your...

RITA

No, I suppose not. I just couldn't help noticing how he looked at you. Even through his pain.

PAM

You're mistaken. He hasn't even tried to kiss me.

RITA

Is he gay?

PAM

Barb, our stage manager, who seems to know these things, says no. He was married once. I think he may not be completely over it.

RITA

That can be a problem. And that allergy to hamsters! That could be a deal breaker!

(They share a laugh.)

Honestly, he seems like a nice enough guy. I have a sense about these things. The two of you make a... memorable couple. I hope you figure things out.

PAM

Thank you, Rita, but there's really nothing to figure out.

(LARRY enters on this last line. He is a little spacey having just taken pain medication.)

LARRY

What are we trying to figure out?

PAM (*startled*)

Uh... How to get to the wedding. Look at the time!

(LARRY's phone rings.)

LARRY

Did you hear something?

PAM

Your phone!

LARRY

Oh! It's Mark. What do you think he wants?

PAM

He probably wants to know where his best man is! What's wrong with you?

LARRY

I have an intercostal strain. They gave me a painkiller. I'm feeling a little woozy.

PAM

Give me the phone. I'll talk to him. Mark, hi! It's Pam. Yes, this is Larry's phone. No no no, it's not like that... What do you mean everyone is saying...? What? Oh, Larry. We're at the hospital. He has a... a... what did you call it?

LARRY

An intercostal strain.

PAM

An inter... you heard? Yes, of course. He wants to talk to you.

LARRY

Hello?

(Pulls the phone away as Mark is obviously yelling at him)

Mark, calm down, buddy... What do you mean I sound drunk? I'm fine. We're heading there now. Give my best to your lovely...  
*(He jerks the phone away as it is obvious Mark has hung up. To Pam and Rita)* Wedding jitters, I guess.

RITA

You two should be on your way. And careful with those painkillers. Only take them if the pain is unbearable. You seem to have a low tolerance.

PAM

You should see him after one glass of wine.

RITA

Good luck to you both. (*To Pam*) And remember, look beyond the obvious.

PAM

Who said that?

RITA

I did.

(BLACKOUT and End of Scene)

### Scene Five

*The wedding reception. PAM is seated at a table off to one side. She is still in her pickleball outfit looking uncomfortable. LARRY is center stage standing behind a small table. He is still in his pickleball outfit with the addition of a tuxedo jacket. There is a glass of champagne on the table. LARRY retrieves a pill bottle from his shorts, takes a pill, and washes it down with the champagne. PAM buries her head in her hands. LARRY becomes increasingly woozy as the scene progresses.*

LARRY

Good afternoon everyone. For those who don't know me, I'm Larry Little, the best man. I can assure you that is in title only. Thank you, Mark, for lending me your jacket. Friends, relatives, country club members, lend me your trousers! We are gathered together to celebrate the miracle that is Mark and... shit can you believe that? I just drew a complete blank.

PAM (*whispering*)

Lisa!

MARK

(Crossing to Pam)

What?

PAM

Lisa.

LARRY

Lisa! Right! Lisa with an "s!" Mark and *Lisa!* Mark and *Li-sa.* Lisa and Mark. What do you think they'll be known as? Lisa and Mark? Or Mark and Lisa? I prefer Mark and Lisa. Not to play favorites. It just has a better sound. You get that solid *Mark* sound followed by a lilting *Li-sa.* Mark! And *Li-sa...* Lovely. Lisa and Mark. Ho-hum. Am I right? Here's another one. Larry and Pam. Or Pam and Larry?

(PAM is becoming increasingly uncomfortable. She tries signaling Larry to stop.)

LARRY

Pam and Larry. That just doesn't work. You have to put the accent on that awful *Lar* sound. Sounds like someone stepped on a cat's tail. Oh, hey, I love cats! Now and forever! So... So... oh, right. Larry and Pam. Steady. Solid. Comfortable. Too comfortable. I never even... I was too afraid to lose...

PAM

Larry, don't do this. This isn't the time or place.

LARRY

Everyone, I give you the lovely Pam Prescott! The love of my life! "Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

PAM

That's enough! I'm sorry... Lisa and Mark... everyone. Larry's on some medication and he's not himself. Come on Larry.

LARRY

I just confessed my love!

PAM

Don't make me do something that I have to confess!

LARRY

I... I... love...

(LARRY suddenly becomes nauseous. He turns upstage and ducks behind the table as we hear retching sounds.)

(PAM runs out.)

(BLACKOUT and End of Scene.)

## Scene Six

*Backstage as at the beginning of the play.*

BARB

Thirty minutes to curtain and I don't have a Touchstone or an assistant. Maybe we should just cancel closing night!

(PAM enters dressed for her assistant stage manager duties.)

PAM

Sorry, sorry, sorry! I know I'm late! You just wouldn't believe how crazy this day has been!

BARB

Spare me the excuses. Where's Larry?

PAM

He's not here?

BARB

Nooo. Did something happen?

PAM

What makes you think that?

BARB

It's just you two are the talk of the after show drinking crowd. Of course, I just listen. And drink.

PAM

Thanks. I guess. There's really nothing to be gossiping about. Although Larry did make a bit of a scene at the wedding today.

BARB

Do tell!

(LARRY enters still in tennis whites.)

LARRY

Don't tell. Sorry to be late.

PAM

That was quite a performance. Did you get everything out of your system?

LARRY

Yes, literally. Pam, I'm sorry about everything.

PAM

Everything?

LARRY

What?

PAM

You humiliated me in front of Mark and *Li-sa*!

LARRY

I'm so sorry.

PAM

And a roomful of strangers!

LARRY

I'm sorry about that too.

PAM

And there's the things you said to me.

BARB

Now we're getting somewhere!

(PAM and LARRY stare at her.)  
Fifteen minutes to places.

(She exits.)

PAM and LARRY

Thank you, fifteen.

LARRY

I better get into costume.

PAM

So everything you said today... that was just the pain reliever talking?

LARRY

Not everything.

PAM

Would you care to clarify?

LARRY

I will. After. Right now I need to change and get into character.

PAM

How hard can it be to become a fool?

LARRY

Touché stone.

(He exits.)

PAM

Jerk! I don't get him. What does he want from me?

(BARB enters.)

BARB

What do you want from him?

PAM

Don't sneak up on me like that!

BARB

I'll send an email to announce when I'm approaching. My question still stands. What do you want from him?

PAM

I don't know anymore. I thought I wanted... I wanted him to... But he's obviously not...

BARB

Sometimes you have to look beyond the obvious.

Who said that?  
PAM

I did.  
BARB

Must be from a fortune cookie or something.  
PAM

I don't understand you young people. If you have something to say to him, just say it. Get him out on the pickleball court again, wear him down, and get your courage up.  
BARB

Come on, Larry! Spill your guts! Oh, maybe I shouldn't say that. What do you want from me, Larry?  
PAM  
(PAM starts acting as if she were playing pickleball.)

(As LARRY enters from behind PAM in his Touchstone costume, PAM quickly pulls her "paddle" back as if preparing for a forehand stroke. Instead, she punches LARRY in the gut and he doubles over in pain.)

Ow! What was that for?!  
LARRY

Sorry! It was an accident!  
PAM

She was taking her frustration out on the pickleball court. Can you blame her?  
BARB

I'm the one in agony here!  
LARRY

Can you go on? Try to straighten up.  
BARB

(He tries but this only increases the pain.)

LARRY

Ohhh!

PAM

Ohhh! This is serious!

BARB

You're telling me! We can't have a hunchback Touchstone! (*She laughs*)

PAM

Barb, I think you need to take this a little more seriously.

BARB

You both need to lighten up. Jimmy has been preparing all day for this very situation. We even got him a costume since he's about a foot shorter. Get Larry to the hospital. We'll carry on here. (*Calling offstage.*) Jimmy?! Get ready, Hon! Five minutes to places!

(She exits.)

PAM

Look at you. I'm really sorry, Larry.

LARRY

I'm sorry too. I guess I've been kind of a jerk lately.

PAM

No argument there. Come on. I'll take you to the hospital. Walk this way.

(Pam is walking upright, but Larry is walking like a hunchback.)

PAM

No. This way.

LARRY

Not funny.

(BLACKOUT and End of Scene.)

## Scene Seven

*Back at the emergency room. RITA is on the phone.*

RITA

I tell you, Sheila, it's so quiet tonight that it feels more like a morgue than an emergency room! No, nothing interesting at all. Not like that crazy pickleball couple!

*(She laughs as LARRY and PAM enter. LARRY still in his Touchstone costume and still walking like a hunchback.)*

RITA

Sheila, you won't believe who just came in. Ickle-pay all-bay! I'll call you later! Well, what is it this time? Another big sneeze?

PAM

I hit him with my backswing.

RITA

You were playing pickleball dressed like a joker?

PAM

He's not a joker, he's a fool.

LARRY

Please, can I just see a doctor?! It hurts to breathe.

RITA

Sure, hon. It's a slow night. Head on back. They'll be happy to see you.

*(LARRY exits.)*

*(PAM and RITA stare at each other for a moment.)*

PAM

Go ahead. Whatever is, just say it.

RITA

Fate. That's what it is. Fate. For better or worse, you two are meant to be together.

PAM

I'm beginning to think so too. But I'm not sure Larry feels the same.

RITA

Right now he's just feeling pain. Just wait. I have a sense about these things. I was telling my friend, Sheila...

PAM

Oh my god! I feel like the whole world is talking about us!

RITA

Not the *whole* world. But when it gets out that we have a patient dressed like a joker...

PAM

He's not a joker, he's a...

RITA

I know, fool. Well, if you want my two cents, you're both fools if you don't figure out what's going on between you.

(LARRY, offstage, screams in agony.)

PAM

What was that?!

RITA

The doctor probably pressed his rib cage. From the sound of it your boyfriend may have a fracture.

PAM

He's not my boyfriend!

RITA

Well, if you want him to be this could be the opportunity you've been waiting for.

PAM

Opportunity?

RITA

If it's a fracture, he's going to need some tender loving care. Simple tasks like getting dressed will be a challenge for him.

PAM

Hmm... I don't know...

RITA

Don't take too long to think about it.

(LARRY enters standing a little straighter than before. He walks gingerly.)

PAM

We heard you scream. Are you ok?

LARRY

Fractured rib. Six weeks to heal. Bandaged up. Extra strength pain reliever.

RITA (*more to Pam than Larry*)

Do you have someone at home to help you?

LARRY

Not really. I suppose I could call my mother.

RITA (*to Pam again*)

His mother!

PAM

You're coming home with me!

RITA and LARRY

What?!

PAM

I'll take care of you. I have the summer off. It'll be nice to have some company.

(As previously, RITA should be between the other two and watching the conversation go back and forth much like following a game of pickleball.)

LARRY

I don't want to inconvenience you like that.

PAM

It'll be fine.

LARRY

I hate to impose.

PAM

I think the time together would be good for us. A chance to talk. Really get to know each other.

LARRY

I'd like that. Pam, I want to express my feelings, but not under the influence of extra strength pain reliever. I want to be able to express them in due time, organically.

PAM

What? Is that from *An Actor Prepares*?

LARRY

No. The Old Farmer's Almanac.

RITA

Then it's settled! And if things work out as I hope they will, I happen to be a certified justice of the peace.

LARRY

We'll be in touch.

(PAM and RITA share a knowing smile.)

PAM

I guess it's true. The quickest way to a man's heart is through the fourth and fifth ribs.

LARRY

"It is the first time that ever I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies."

(BLACKOUT. END OF PLAY.)