

## THE OTHER SIDE

Synopsis:

Ira suddenly meets his grandma, Yetta, again after fifteen years and slowly begins to realize he is on the threshold of the Other Side. Under Yetta's questioning, Ira he begins to unfold the story of the car accident that brought him there. In the meantime, two rescue workers and Ira's wife, Carla, oversee operations to get the car out of the ditch and Ira out of the car. Though they cannot see and hear Ira and Yetta, Ira and Yetta can see and hear them, eliciting discussion of some of Ira's earthly challenges, including tensions with Carla. Throughout, Ira is tempted by the glowing light, fantastic colors, and ethereal music, and believes he has a choice whether to stay or go back. Yetta shows he has another think coming.

Cast (1M, 2F, 2M or F)

Ira, M, 35-55, husband and father

Yetta, F, 75-100, grandmother

First Rescue Worker, M or F, 25-65

Second Rescue Worker, M or F, 25-65

Carla, 30-50, F, wife and mother

Approximate running time:

45 minutes

## The Other Side

*Setting: The stage is strewn with puffy furniture and floor cushions in bright, bold colors and patterns. The designer should think in terms of Marimekko, Emilio Pucci, or Lilly Pulitzer prints. Back of the playing space is covered with diaphanous white drapes. Downstage right corner of the stage is separated from the rest of the playing space with orange traffic cones, warning triangles, police barricades, or other emergency equipment.*

*At curtain's rise, Yetta is standing stage left looking off stage right. She is in her eighties or nineties, white hair or turban, in a colorful patterned dress or caftan, pearls, pearl earrings, carrying a handbag.*

*After a beat, Ira enters stage right, leaping backwards onto the stage as if he's been pushed forcibly from offstage. He is a man between 35 and 55, dressed in a white or light gray hospital gown and boxers, or scrubs. He is barefoot or wearing white socks. He stands for a beat looking off right.*

YETTA

Ira! What are you doing here?

*Ira spins around and reacts with surprise.*

IRA

Grandma?

YETTA

Who else?

IRA

Grandma! I haven't seen you in, what is it, fifteen years?

YETTA

No, I understand, sweetheart. You had your own life to live. Have.

IRA

Mm.

YETTA

It's nice to see you, though.

IRA

You, too.

*Beat.*

YETTA

I wish it was under better circumstances.

IRA

What do you mean? And what do you mean, what am I doing here? What are you doing here?

YETTA

I heard you were coming.

IRA

Well, that's nice you came to meet me. (*Pause.*) But how did you hear? Who did you hear it from?

YETTA

Oh, word gets around here.

IRA

Here? Where is here? How did I get here? (*Beat.*) How did you get here?

YETTA

How I got here is yesterday's news. It's how you got here. And what are you doing here?

IRA

Yeah, you already asked me that.

*Ira looks around at surroundings.*

IRA (*cont.*)

It's nice here. Those colors...

YETTA

Everyone says that, at first. Not really my taste.

IRA

Right, no plastic slipcovers.

YETTA

They don't really need them here.

IRA

You always had them over everything.

YETTA

I was worried you or your brother were going to spill on the sofa.

IRA

Yeesh, Grandma, we never spilled anything. Well, Matt did, maybe.

YETTA

But if you had. It was a real fear.

IRA

No, I get it. Anyway, like you said, you don't need them here.

YETTA

No spills.

IRA

Maybe that explains how they keep everything so nice.

YETTA

Yes, that's one reason. *(Beat.)* I'm going to sit.

*Yetta sits on a piece of puffy furniture.*

IRA

Oh, good idea.

*Ira moves to sit beside Yetta, but she quickly shifts to the spot where he was going to sit. Ira looks at her quizzically.*

IRA

I still don't know how I got here. Or how you could be here. Or where here is, even.

YETTA

I'm not surprised.

IRA

This doesn't look like where I was. It seems realer somehow. Realer than real.

YETTA

Everybody says that.

IRA

I just can't remember how I got from...there to here.

YETTA

There...where?

IRA

Costa Rica. We were in Costa Rica, I think. In the mountains.

YETTA

Oh, Costa Rica. Your cousin Vik used to live there. Did you see him?

IRA

Grandma, that was years ago. This seems like it was just happening. It's just, I can't remember leaving there.

YETTA

Start with what you do remember. What do you remember, darling?

IRA

I was driving up a mountain road with Carla and the kids. We have three now.

YETTA

That's nice.

IRA (*suddenly remembering*)

We named the little one after you, you know.

YETTA

You named her Yetta?

IRA

No, her Hebrew name, I mean.

YETTA

Yetta isn't Hebrew.

IRA

Yiddish...whatever. Anyway, where was I?

YETTA

On a mountain road with the kids.

IRA

Oh. Oh, yeah. So, the road was wet, and I was lost. Carla was yelling at me to turn around, and the kids were jumping up and down in the backseat. There was no shoulder and no guardrail, and I told Carla I couldn't turn around there, but I could back up back down the hill to where there was enough space to turn.

*Yetta rises.*

YETTA

Oh my god, your grandfather did something like that once. Did I give it to him! I started hitting him with my pocketbook...

IRA

Fortunately, Carla didn't do that. Can you imagine, on that steep road?

YETTA

From what I see, it might have ended up the same. But anyway...

IRA

Right, I was telling you what I remember.

YETTA

Yes, and I'm listening, sweetheart. When I started to leave my...leave...I started to see maybe I could have listened more.

IRA

No, no, Grandma, it's okay. I'm just trying to understand...

YETTA

You don't have to do that.

IRA

Do what?

YETTA

Make me feel better. Make people feel better. For me, it couldn't matter less at this point. But that's not your job.

IRA

Is that what I was doing?

YETTA

It sounded like it to me. But anyway, what happened? You were on the road in Costa Rica and started backing up.

IRA

Oh, yeah. Well...

*Two Rescue Workers enter the downstage right playing area. Ira sees them out of the corner of his eye and turns.*

IRA (cont.)

Hey, who are those guys?

*Lights come up in downstage right area. The Two Rescue Workers crouch down as if looking into a ditch.*

*NOTE: All characters are looking out front when sighting the car, the crane, the rescue operations, the ambulance, etc. These elements are not shown on the stage and are unseen by the audience.*

*Ira and Yetta can see and hear what's happening in the downstage area; the Two Rescue Workers and Carla cannot see and hear what's happening in the main playing space.*

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

We're going to need the Jaws of Life to get him out of there.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

First, we have to get the car out of the ditch.

IRA

That's for sure the road I was on.

YETTA

Interesting.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

We are going to need a crane to lift the car. Call to the Central Authority.

IRA (*to Yetta*)

This is incredible. I don't even speak Spanish, but I can understand everything they're saying.

YETTA

That's nothing.

IRA

Sounds like someone's trapped in that car.

YETTA

Oh, yeah?

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

And an ambulance?

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

If that poor schmuck is still alive.

IRA

I didn't know schmuck was a word in Spanish.

YETTA

It isn't.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

We'd need one anyway. You know, to take the body away.

*Lights go down on downstage area. Two Rescue Workers exit.*

IRA

The body? Gee, that's a terrible way to go. Crashed into a ditch, I mean.

YETTA

Yeah, it is. Can you think of a good way to go? I was in my own bed in the nursing home and that stunk, too. (*Beat.*) But now, here I am.

*Yetta sits.*

IRA

Oh, so you are gone.

*Ira moves to sit beside Yetta. Again, she moves into the spot where he was going to sit, and he looks at her quizzically, then continues to speak, standing.*

IRA (*cont.*)

That's what I thought. I mean, I know I never visited you in the nursing home, except that one time when I got engaged to Carla. I do remember going to your funeral, though.

YETTA

The unveiling, too.

IRA

So you knew? I didn't want Carla to go to that because by then, she was expecting.

YETTA

Oh, yeah, I remember that, too. Well, that couldn't matter less, either, not to me now.

IRA

Oh yeah? Well, how about this: Matt didn't even come to the burial. Your own grandson.

YETTA (*after a pause*)

True, but...you've gotta feel the love.

IRA

Huh?

YETTA

You're supposed to feel the love here. Are you feeling it?

IRA

I...

*A white light shines from the stage left wings. Ira begins to move toward the light as if drawn.*

IRA (*cont.*)

Yes...I think I'm feeling it...

*Yetta steps into his path.*

YETTA

Let's not go there.

*White light fades. Ira turns back toward center.*

YETTA (*cont.*)

You were saying about not letting Carla come to the unveiling. Do you think it helped anything, that she didn't go?

IRA

No, it was just superstition. The delivery was complicated, and the kid still had problems. Has, I mean. (*Pause.*) Say, I wonder where they are. Did they get out of the car? (*Looks downstage right.*) Huh, would you look at that.

YETTA

What?

IRA

That looks like the car I was driving.

*Yetta rises and looks downstage right.*

YETTA

Imagine that. (*Beat.*) You never finished telling me what happened.

IRA

Where was I?

YETTA

Backing up down the wet mountain road in the jungle.

IRA

The kids call it the rain forest.

YETTA

Rain forest, whatever. With your whole family in the car.

IRA

When you say it like that, it doesn't sound very bright.

YETTA

For a smart guy, you can be a bit of a putz.

IRA

Thanks a bunch.

YETTA

I calls 'em like I sees 'em.

IRA

You always did. (*Beat.*) Say, that reminds me of that joke you used to tell. About the judge?

YETTA

That was no joke! That was a true story.

IRA

How did that go again?

YETTA

When I was young there was a judge in New York named Peter Schmuck. Originally, it was Putz, but he thought he should change it.

IRA (*laughs gently*)

That's the one.

YETTA

Maybe it was the other way around. But, you know, it didn't really matter. Schmuck, Putz. It's all the same.

IRA

Nowadays, we'd say, "it's all good."

YETTA (*sighs*)

All good.

IRA

It's nice to visit like this. Makes me feel all warm inside.

YETTA

Maybe you're feeling the love. You know *I* always loved you. (*Pause.*) Now, even more so, maybe. Since *I* feel the love, I mean.

IRA

I guess I knew you did. You were a tough cookie, though.

YETTA

I was. I had to be. I grew up in the Bronx. And in those days, and with my two brothers...

IRA

I remember them.

YETTA

A couple of toughs. And my mother!

IRA

I heard about her from Mom.

YETTA

She was another one. No disrespect.

*Yetta looks up, scanning the sky. Ira moves toward and peers down into downstage right area.*

IRA

You know, this is weird.

YETTA

What?

IRA

It's like—it's like I can see into that car.

YETTA

Not yet. Finish your story.

IRA

Oh, so I started backing up. Slowly, you know. And the car was a stickshift, so...

YETTA

I never learned to drive, but even if I did, I would want an automatic. That's what your grandfather always said, and he was a cabdriver.

IRA (*shrugs*)

They didn't have any automatics left at the car rental place at the airport, and we wanted to get on the road, so I figured I'd chance it.

YETTA (*sarcastic*)

Smart move.

IRA (*stung*)

Grandma!

YETTA

I'm sorry, sweetheart. It's all love. Do you feel the love?

*The beam of white light appears again from offstage left. Ira turns toward it.*

IRA

Yes. Yes, I'm beginning to.

*He starts moving slowly toward the light. Yetta blocks him.*

YETTA

Not yet. Feel it here.

*White light slowly fades.*

YETTA (*cont.*)

You have to finish your story.

IRA

What? Oh. Oh, yeah. So, I start backing up down the mountain, and the road's a little twisty, and it's slippery, and then I feel the rear wheel slide off the road, and we're on the edge of this...abyss, I guess you'd call it.

YETTA

You'd call it. You were always with the ten-dollar words.

*Two Rescue Workers enter downstage area. They look up this time.*

IRA

Hey, those guys are there again.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

The crane got here fast, considering it's the rain forest.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Yeah, I hope the operator can find a spot where it can reach that car without falling in, too.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

That guy looks like he knows what he's doing.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

I wonder if that idiot down there is still breathing.

IRA

Oh, gosh, I hope so.

YETTA

Do you? I'm glad, darling.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Americans, man.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Right? But his wife and kids don't look so good. For their sake, I mean...

IRA

Oh, the poor guy had a family. Has...

YETTA

Anybody can make a mistake.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

You're all heart.

*Carla enters downstage right area. She is a few years younger than Ira, dressed for a day of vacation in the tropics.*

IRA

Oh my god, it's Carla!

CARLA

Can they get him out? They have to get him out. What if he's dead in there?

IRA (to Yetta)

She speaks Spanish, you know.

YETTA

Interesting. You always picked, um, interesting girls.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Try to stay calm, ma'am. The crane operator knows what he's doing.

CARLA

How can you be sure? Do you know him?

*Ira moves closer to downstage area and peers past it.*

IRA

Grandma, that guy in the car.

YETTA

Uh huh.

IRA

Weird, but I can see him now.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

He's calling us over.

*Two Rescue Workers exit. Carla lingers a moment looking out, then opens her bag and pulls out her cellphone.*

CARLA

Still no reception.

*She throws the phone back into the bag and exits.*

YETTA

And what do you see?

IRA

I, uh...

*The white light beams in again from upstage left. Ira turns and moves toward it as if drawn.*

IRA (cont.)

It's me.

*He takes a few more steps toward light.*

IRA (cont.)

But I really want to see what's over there.

*Ethereal music begins to play.*

IRA (cont.)

I feel so warm, and everything's so beautiful.

*Yetta steps between Ira and the light.*

YETTA

Don't get any ideas, smart guy.

IRA

Grandma, what?

YETTA

You can't go there. Not now.

IRA

Why not?

YETTA

You didn't finish telling me.

*White light dims, music fades. Ira snaps out of it, turns back.*

IRA

Oh. Oh, where was I?

YETTA

Over the "abyss."

*Yetta sits.*

IRA

Oh, yeah. Right. *(Pause.)* So, the rear wheel was off the road, and fortunately...

YETTA

Fortunately?

IRA

The car stalled. They'll do that sometimes. With a standard transmission, I mean. That much I know.

YETTA

So, then?

IRA

The driver's side was the wheel still on the road, so I opened my door and jumped out. Everyone inside the car looked a little stunned, so I yelled at them, "Everybody out!" I grabbed Carla's hand and pulled her out. I opened the backdoor and Stevie and Melissa jumped right out.

YETTA

Didn't you say you had three? Have?

IRA

Yeah, but Julie—she's the one we named after you—she was frozen in the backseat. Petrified. And she was at the far end of the seat, right over the rear wheel that was farthest off the road. I didn't want to shift the center of gravity, but I wanted to get my kid out of there. I sprawled over the backseat and grabbed her and pulled her out.

YETTA

That's some story.

IRA

Yeah. So, the kids are okay, and Carla's okay. And me?

YETTA

Wait. So, how'd the car get in the ditch?

*Lights come up on downstage area. Carla enters with Two Rescue Workers.*

CARLA

I told him not to get back in the car.

IRA

She did.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

That was good advice.

CARLA

But he said he had to. He said there was no other way to get the car out of here than to try to get it back on the road.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Well, if three wheels were on the road, it sounds like it could have worked.

YETTA (*to Ira*)

Did you really think so?

IRA

I didn't really know what to do. Maybe I wasn't thinking straight.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

You'd have to be a really good driver.

CARLA

My husband is pretty good.

IRA

Pretty good? All she ever does is yell at me about my driving!

YETTA

Stop. She's your wife.

IRA

I can't even think straight when I'm driving, she's yelling so much.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Doesn't really look that way from this angle.

CARLA

It wasn't really his fault.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Whose, then?

YETTA (*to Ira*)

Yeah whose?

CARLA

I'll tell you.

IRA (*to Yetta*)

I'll tell you.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER (*looking offstage right*)

Your kids are coming.

CARLA

Oh, god, I told them to wait down the hill. They shouldn't see this.

*Carla exits hurriedly.*

FIRST RESCUE WORKER (*looking up*)

The crane operator is yelling at us to move.

*Two Rescue Workers exit right. Light goes down in downstage area.*

IRA

So, I told Carla to go down the hill and wait with the kids, and I'd drive back down. But then, these two people came walking up the hill. A man and a woman. Peasants, I guess you'd call them.

YETTA

You'd call them.

IRA

They could see I was in trouble. It didn't take a genius. And they spoke a little English, and between that and some pantomime...

YETTA

Oh, my god, you with the pantomime. Remember in high school you wanted to go to mime camp? And your mother sent you? I told her she was nuts.

IRA

Grandma, enough. Besides, see? It finally came in handy.

YETTA

Yeah, just when you didn't have your white makeup. I didn't know what was going to become of you! I told your mother, "He's going to end up like your cousin Jordan."

IRA

What ever happened to Jordan?

*Ira moves to sit, and again, Yetta shifts quickly into his spot.*

YETTA

Oh...He's part of the love.

IRA

The love. Grandma, do you feel okay? All this love stuff isn't like you.

*Ethereal music starts. White light beams from stage left wings. Ira turns and moves toward it.*

IRA (cont.)

But it feels so nice.

*Yetta rises and moves to block him.*

IRA

Grandma, move!

YETTA

Ah, ah, where's the love?

IRA

Over there. Feels like it's over there. I want the love,

YETTA

It's not for you.

IRA

Geez, Grandma, why not for me? What's wrong with me?

YETTA

For starters, you didn't finish telling me about the people on the road.

*White light dims. Ira turns back toward center. Yetta moves to sit, Ira following her. As she sits, she gives him a warning look, and Ira backs off.*

IRA

And why won't you let me sit?

YETTA

You shouldn't get too comfortable, mister.

*Light comes up on downstage area. Two Rescue Workers enter. During the following, they look progressively upward as the car is being lifted out of the ditch.*

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

I can't believe it. He's actually pulling it out.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

That guy really is good. Just driving the crane up this road is already something.

*Carla enters.*

CARLA

Should I give him some money?

IRA

Again with the money.

YETTA

What about the money?

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Money?

CARLA

You know, so he does a good job.

IRA

She always thinks money is going to solve things. It's like she bribes people.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Oh, well, he works for the government. I mean, they pay him.

CARLA

Do they?

YETTA

It's not so crazy.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Of course! This is Costa Rica!

*Yetta stands.*

YETTA

Don't you want that guy to do a good job?

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Yeah, this isn't El Salvador or something.

IRA

I don't know...I guess so.

CARLA

I didn't mean to offend anyone.

*Carla opens bag and takes out phone again.*

CARLA (*cont.*)

We have travel insurance, you know. I'm trying to check if something like this is covered, but there's no fucking reception. (*Beat.*) Sorry. It's just...where I come from, sometimes people appreciate a little tip.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

We're people.

YETTA

What do you mean, you don't know?

CARLA

I just want them to do a good job.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

We want to do a good job, too.

*Carla turns away from Two Rescue Workers and starts rifling in her bag to see how much money she has.*

SECOND RESCUE WORKER (*to First Rescue Worker*)

Stop. We get paid by the government, too.

IRA

This is what I mean. If you pay one, you have to pay everyone. And we spent half the day trying to find an ATM, and none of them were working. So, she doesn't have any money anyway.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

She's a nice lady. At least she speaks Spanish. And she has those kids.

YETTA

So, if she doesn't have, she doesn't have. What's to get mad about?

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

I have kids of my own, you know. Shoes are expensive.

IRA

Now she brought it up, everyone will get mad when she doesn't tip them.

YETTA

And you call me tough?

*At this point, the Two Rescue Workers are standing and looking up at the car hanging from the crane.*

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Oh lord!

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Look at the car!

*Ira has also been following with his eyes. Carla stops looking in her bag and turns to look. She covers her mouth with her hand.*

IRA

Look at that car!

YETTA

What?

*Ira moves to turn her in the right direction to see.*

YETTA

Just point. Don't touch.

IRA

God, Grandma, it's just like Matt used to say.

YETTA

Oh, yeah? What did Matt used to say, who didn't even come to my funeral?

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Squashed like a sardine can.

IRA

That you could be a real b...

*He catches sight of car.*

IRA (*cont.*)

Oh, my god. How could anyone be alive in there?

CARLA

How could he be alive in there?

YETTA

Never mind about that. Just tell me what happened with the people on the road.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER (*to Carla*)

The Lord moves in a mysterious way.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Okay, time for the Jaws of Life.

*Two Rescue Workers exit. Carla remains looking up at car.*

CARLA

I hope to god this is covered.

IRA

So I got back in the car.

CARLA

This can't be happening. What were you thinking?

*During the following, Ira becomes increasingly distraught.*

YETTA

Even though you told Carla you wouldn't.

IRA

Even though I told Carla I wouldn't. I got the car started and put it in drive and was gunning the engine.

*Carla zips or snaps her bag shut.*

CARLA

I don't have any pesos anyway. I wonder if they'd take dollars.

*Carla exits. Light goes down in downstage area.*

YETTA

What were the people doing? The “peasants”?

IRA

They were, like, rocking the car, trying to lever it back onto the road.

YETTA

And then?

IRA

The engine stalled again, and they kept rocking, and the car...the car...the car...

YETTA

Went over.

IRA

Went over. Went down.

YETTA

That’s when I heard you were coming. I rushed over here.

*Yetta sits.*

IRA

Yeah. (*Beat.*) That was nice, seeing you when I got here.

YETTA

Tell me another thing.

IRA

What?

YETTA

What were you thinking when the car went over?

IRA

I was thinking...I was thinking, "I don't want to die." (*Beat.*) That's a funny thing.

YETTA

What's funny?

IRA

A lot of times, I've thought, "I'd rather be dead."

*Ira moves to sit next to Yetta. She doesn't change places. Just as Ira is about to sit, he stops himself and remains upright.*

YETTA

Yeah? Like when?

IRA

When I had to feed Stevie when he was baby and he wouldn't eat for anything. Or when I dropped Julie when she was an infant and I had to take her to the hospital and explain to the doctors. Or when Carla would say I wasn't contributing anything even though I was working my ass off *and* changing diapers.

YETTA

So?

IRA

So, when the car was going over, I was fighting to get out. I was pushing at the door, and I even got it open, but then with the force, I guess, it banged shut and hit me on the head. If I was fighting like that, I guess I really wouldn't have rather been dead.

YETTA

You know, all those things you talked about?

IRA

You mean the times with the feeding and the hospital and the fighting?

YETTA

Those were love, too.

IRA

Love? How?

*The white light appears from offstage left, and ethereal music begins to play. Ira turns toward the light.*

IRA (*cont.*)

It wasn't love like this. (*Moving toward the light:*) Like that.

*Yetta rises.*

YETTA

Hold it right there, buster.

*White light begins to fade. Ira turns back toward Yetta.*

IRA

Why do you keep stopping me? You keep saying it's all love, and now I know this love exists. I want to be part of the love! This love.

YETTA

So do me something. (*Laughs.*) You can't!

*Ira stares at Yetta for a long moment. Carla enters downstage right.*

IRA

You know, I feel like I saw you one other time. In the last fifteen years, I mean.

CARLA

I have to calm down. I don't know what I'm doing.

YETTA

Oh?

IRA

Not saw exactly.

CARLA

I would have given those guys every cent I had.

YETTA

Then what?

IRA

I was on this retreat.

CARLA

I would have had nothing left to get the kids back to the condo.

*Carla turns toward stage left and waves, forcing a smile.*

CARLA (*cont.*)

I can't let the kids see me like this.

YETTA

Here we go. A retreat yet.

IRA

Don't make fun. I met Carla on a retreat.

*Carla sits cross-legged and closes her eyes.*

YETTA

That? That was a singles weekend. In the Catskills.

IRA

Well, we meditated and did yoga and stuff. Oh, and there was a sweat lodge.

YETTA

Sounds...attractive.

*Carla begins to do yoga breathing exercises. Two Rescue Workers enter and stand some distance from Carla, watching her.*

IRA

Fat lot of good it did me.

YETTA

What do you mean?

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

What's she doing?

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

What do I know? Praying?

IRA

Well, look at me.

*Ira looks down at his garb.*

IRA (*cont.*)

Well, not like I am now. What I mean is, once we were married, I was always stressed and anxious about something.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Well, we got him out, but she still never gave us any money.

YETTA

Boy, do I know what that's like. You know your grandfather the cabdriver?

IRA

Yeah.

YETTA

Before we got married, his mother warned me. She said, "Yetta, Manny likes to sit with his feet up." Did I listen?

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Money! Always with you money. What about your reward in heaven?

IRA

Why not?

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

My reward in heaven isn't going to put shoes on my kids' feet.

YETTA

I thought living with him would calm me down.

IRA (*chuckling*)

Yeah, that didn't work. From what I remember.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Come on, let's not disturb her.

YETTA

Your memory's okay. You know what happened? *I made him* anxious. Then there was two of us! (*Beat.*) But enough about me, darling. You were telling me about when you saw me...on the retreat.

*Yetta sits.*

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

Yeah, it's not like *he's* going anywhere.

*Two Rescue Workers exit right.*

IRA

Well, it wasn't like that other retreat, where I met Carla. This particular place, I went alone.

YETTA

Why alone?

IRA

I told you, I was stressed and anxious. I thought I could get back some of that peaceful feeling from before all that started.

YETTA

And meet someone else, maybe?

IRA

God, no, Grandma, that's the last thing I needed.

YETTA

So, what happened?

IRA

Well, I went to this seminar about spirit guides, and there was this...this spirit guide lady there, who would do a reading or a consultation or whatever she called it.

YETTA

Spirit guides?

IRA

Yeah, like, your ancestors silently pushing you in this direction or that. There was also a past lives person. You could do a regression.

YETTA

No past lives. Stick to the spirit guide lady.

IRA

Well, she was looking at me, and she said she saw a grandmother figure around me.

YETTA

No kidding?

IRA

Yeah. And she asked if I could think of anyone like that, and I thought of you.

YETTA

That's nice.

IRA

And she said your grandmother has a question for you. It's from the Chasidic story about Reb Zusya.

YETTA

Must have been your other grandmother.

IRA

I don't know how the spirit guide lady knew the story. I don't think she was Jewish. She had a third eye, and these eagle feathers, and, like, crystals. Anyhow, the story is, Reb Zusya is dying,

and he's weeping. And his disciple says, "Why are you weeping? You are as wise as Moses, as hospitable as Abraham, and heaven will welcome you." And Reb Zusya says, "But Hashem isn't going to ask me whether I was like Moses or Abraham"...

*Yetta rises.*

YETTA

Oh, I do remember this! He's going to ask, "Why weren't you like Reb Zusya?"

IRA

That's it!

YETTA

My father used to tell it. *(Beat.)* You were named after him, you know. Are.

IRA

I know.

YETTA

Your Hebrew name I mean. Nice man. *(Beat.)* You know, there's another reason he was crying in the story.

IRA

Yeah?

YETTA

Yeah. This I only learned from being here. He'd never become more like Reb Zusya here. *(Gesturing out front:)* That he can only do...there.

*Yetta looks downstage right.*

YETTA *(cont.)*

Hey, look over there. Look what they're doing.

IRA

I can't look. I...I...

*Lights come up in downstage area. Carla opens her eyes and stands, looking out front.*

CARLA

I can't watch. Oh, my god, Ira, what an idiot!

IRA

Who's an idiot?

*Carla looks offstage right.*

CARLA

Thank god the kids calmed down at least. It was nice of that man to say he'd watch them. I shouldn't leave them too long, though.

IRA

She left the kids with a man in the rain forest while she sat here meditating? Who's an idiot?

YETTA

Calm down. It's all I...

IRA

It's not all love, it's not all love. She's calling me an idiot and she left our kids with a stranger in the middle of the jungle and sat here in the lotus position!

YETTA

Rain forest. (*Beat.*) Wanna do something about it?

IRA

Aaargh! Yeah! I wanna do something about it. But what can I do about it here? What do I do...I...

*Ethereal music starts, white light shines from stage left wings. Ira turns as if drawn.*

IRA (*cont.*)

I wanna go over there.

YETTA

Not now.

*Two Rescue Workers enter downstage carrying a body. White light dims, music ceases, Ira droops.*

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

We got him out, lady.

CARLA (*moans*)

Oh...

IRA (*moans*)

Oh...

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

There wasn't much blood, but he's out like a light.

CARLA

Out like a light? Is he...?

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

We called the ambulance while we were working on the car. The guy said it would be a little while.

IRA

Grandma...

YETTA

Yes, darling?

IRA

I don't want to look.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

We should probably turn him over.

*Two Rescue Workers turn body so it's facing up.*

CARLA

The ambulance? Does that mean he's...?

*Carla's attention is captured by something offstage right.*

CARLA (*cont.*)

Oh, god, the kids.

*She rushes off. First Rescue Worker stands up and looks after her.*

YETTA

Look, sweetheart.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

There's the ambulance.

SECOND RESCUE WORKER

Record time, I'd say.

FIRST RESCUE WORKER

We better direct them over here.

*Two Rescue Workers exit. Light stays up downstage.*

IRA

At what? That crumpled heap they pulled from the car? That's not me. I mean, that's me. But that's not the real me.

YETTA

What is the real you?

IRA

This!

YETTA

This? What this?

IRA

This! Me here talking to you. *(Beat.)* Isn't it?

YETTA

If you have to ask...

IRA

It feels real. Realer than real.

YETTA

You said that.

*Ira spins around.*

IRA

I mean, look at all these...colors and...patterns.

*White light comes on from stage left wings.*

IRA (*cont.*)

And that light.

*Ethereal music surges.*

IRA (*cont.*)

And that music!

*Ira starts moving toward Yetta.*

IRA (*cont.*)

Grandma. And you're real.

*Ira reaches out a hand to touch her arm. She moves her arm out of way, steps back.*

YETTA

I told you, no touching!

*Ira recoils.*

IRA

Ach. You see? That's how I know you're real. You were always like that. You weren't like the other kids' grandmas, with the baking and the hugs. Cold! Just like Mom always said.

*Carla enters downstage area, kneels by body.*

YETTA

Everyone's a critic. I could tell you a thing or two about your mom. In the meantime, you should look over there.

CARLA

Ira, you drive like an idiot. I always said so.

IRA

Yes, you did. (*To Yetta:*) For this I need to look?

YETTA

Wait.

CARLA

The kids are so scared. They want to know you're okay. I hope they're not watching. (*Looking offstage right.*) Oh god, they're watching. (*Back down to body:*) I know this wouldn't seem important to you, and maybe it is secondary, but if the travel insurance doesn't cover this, this vacation is going to cost a fortune, after I spent months researching the best price on everything. And I can't even call the insurance because there's no reception in this jungle!

*Carla rises and starts to move offstage, stops herself.*

IRA

I love those kids.

*Carla kneels again next to body's head.*

CARLA

I love you.

*She exits hurriedly.*

IRA

You do? (*To Yetta:*) She does? She could have fooled me, the last few years.

*Two Rescue Workers enter with stretcher or gurney, place body on top and roll it off. Lights down in downstage area.*

YETTA

What have I been telling you?

IRA

It's all love. (*Beat.*) It's nice to know, but I still don't want to go back. What if she's right and the insurance doesn't cover it? What if I'm paralyzed and can't work? She's going to kill me.

YETTA

Maybe you should have thought of all that before you decided to drive backwards down a wet road in the jungle.

IRA

God, Grandma, there's no talking to you. Besides, I told you, it's called the rain forest.

YETTA

You don't like it?

*Yetta starts moving toward Ira, backing him slowly toward stage right wings.*

IRA

I never did, when you're like this. Sarcastic. Judgmental.

YETTA

Can't take it?

IRA

When I got here, at first I thought it was like that dream Grandpa used to have.

YETTA

Him again. What dream?

IRA

He was on the bank of a river, and his dead parents were on the other bank, and they were waving him over and saying, "Manny, come join us."

YETTA

Think again. This isn't a dream.

IRA

Why are you like this? Why are you doing this?

YETTA

Somewhere in your brain, you thought I was always watching over you, didn't you?

IRA

Yes, kind of...

YETTA

When your phone rang the night before your bar exam and there was no one there, you thought it was me calling to wish you luck from the other...from here, didn't you?

IRA

Well, yeah...

YETTA

On the way to marry Carla, when your phone suddenly started playing "For and My Gal," you thought that was me, didn't you?

IRA

Sure. When I was a kid, you used to sing that. (*Sings:*) "They're congregatin' for me and my gal..."

YETTA

This isn't *The Twilight Zone*, bubbeleh.

IRA

So, it wasn't you, those times?

YETTA

Did I say that? (*Beat.*) Remember that time you promised to take me to Tavern on the Green for Mother's Day?

IRA

When I was a kid?

YETTA

Kid! You were eighteen. And you called at the last minute and said you had too much homework.

IRA

Oh, yeah...I remember that Sunday.

YETTA

I bet you do. Homework! You were finally getting laid by your girlfriend.

IRA

Wha...how do you know that?

YETTA

Never mind. A person learns all about it in the sweet bye and bye. The important thing is you left me all alone on Mother's Day.

IRA

But, Grandma, it's all love, right?

YETTA

How's this for love?

*She shoves Ira in the chest, pushing him offstage into the stage right wings. Yetta faces center.*

YETTA

Those kids need him. Carla, I'm not so sure.

*The white light beams from offstage left. Ethereal music begins. Yetta turns and walks toward the light.*

*Curtain.*