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# A Narrow Bed

by Ellen McLaughlin

Commissioned and first produced by Actors Theatre of Louisville. Subsequently produced by the Eureka Theatre, San Francisco. Originally produced in New York City by New York Theatre Workshop.

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



New York Hollywood London Toronto

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Actors Theatre of Louisville presents:

A NARROW BED

by Ellen McLaughlin

Directed by Jon Jory

WILLIE. . . . . Patrick Husted  
LUCY. . . . . Debra Monk  
MEGAN. . . . . Beth Dixon  
JOHN. . . . . Bram Lewis  
NURSE. . . . . Ann Hodapp

The play takes place in Alvington, a tiny, rural town in  
upstate New York.

The time is the present, late winter.

Presented by special arrangement with Joyce P. Ketay

Set Design. . . . . Paul Owen  
Costume Design. . . . . Marcia Dixcy  
Light Design. . . . . Jeff Hill  
Sound Design. . . . . David Strang  
Properties Mistress. . . . . Diann Fay  
Fight Director. . . . . Steve Rankin  
Stage Manager. . . . . Debra Acquavella

# *New York Theatre Workshop*

Jean Passanante  
Artistic Director

Nancy Kassak Diekmann  
Managing Director

presents

## **A NARROW BED**

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by

**ELLEN McLAUGHLIN**

**DIRECTED by Sarah Ream**

WILLIE..... Christopher McCann  
LUCY..... Debra Monk  
MEGAN..... Beth Dixon  
JOHN..... Greg Germann  
CONNIE TATE..... Kate McKillip

**E U R E K A**  
T H E A T R E C C M P A N Y

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### **A NARROW BED**

By Ellen McLaughlin  
Directed by Oskar Eustis

### **CAST**

|        |                  |
|--------|------------------|
| Megan  | Abigail Van Alyn |
| Lucy   | Lorri Holt       |
| Willie | Jeffrey King     |
| John   | Ed Hodson        |
| Nurse  | Tina Sigel       |

"I'm sitting down by the highway, down by that highway  
side,  
Everybody's going somewhere, riding just as fast as they  
can ride.  
I guess they got a lot to do before they can rest assured  
their lives are justified.  
Pray to God for me, Babe, he can let me slide.

'Cause I've been up and down this highway, far as my eye  
can see.  
No matter how fast I run, I can't seem to get away from  
me.  
No matter where I am, I can't help feeling I'm just a day  
away from where I want to be.  
Now I'm running home, Baby, like river to the sea.

Baby if you can see me, out across this wilderness,  
There's just one thing I was hoping you might guess,  
Baby you can free me, all in the power of your sweet  
tenderness.

\* \* \*

It's so hard to come by that feeling of peace.  
This friend of mine said, 'Close your eyes, and try a few  
of these'  
I thought I was flying like a bird, so far above my sorrow,  
When I looked down, I was standing on my knees.  
Now I need someone to help me, someone to help me  
please.

Baby if you need me, like I know I need you,  
There's just one thing I was hoping you might do,  
Take my hand and lead me to the hole in your garden  
wall and pull me through."

Jackson Browne

"Your Bright Baby Blues"

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“Ay but to die, and go we know not where:  
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and incertain thought  
Imagine howling—’tis too horrible!  
The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature is a paradise  
To what we fear of death.”

Shakespeare

*For Sarah Ream*

## CHARACTERS

**WILLIE** — Late thirties, early forties. A charming man, kind and funny. But somewhere along the line, he lost track of the best of himself and he knows it.

**LUCY** — Willie's wife, same age. Tough, sweet, challenging. A survivor. Art history professor at the local community college.

**MEGAN** — Late thirties, early forties. Guarded, intelligent, hardened. Nevertheless, she is devoted to Lucy and Willie and is their closest friend, in the largest sense of the word. She has been in a kind of spiritual limbo for such a long time that she may appear to be far more stable than she actually is.

**JOHN** — Twenty-two. Megan's husband, missing in action in Vietnam. A vital presence. He is not necessarily as brilliant as they remember him being, but he is certainly compelling and capable of being a leader. He is concerned as much as anything with trying to figure out why he is where he is. His relationship is to the audience. He speaks his letters home to Megan, prior to his disappearance.

**CONNIE (NURSE)** — Twenty-six. Resourceful, unflappable, ironic. A credit to her profession.

**THE PLACE:** Alvington, New York. A tiny rural town upstate.

**THE SET:** Stationary pieces are a hospital bed, stage right, and a free-standing wooden closet, stage left. Movable pieces are a projection screen upstage, several wooden chairs, a cafeteria table and perhaps a standing institutional ashtray for the corridor scene.

**THE TIME:** 1987. Late Winter.

Note on the text:

One speech follows another, unless a speech includes a slash (/), which indicates that the next speaker interrupts the previous speaker at this point. As in:

MEGAN. — Yes, well, I suppose he could have tried the Ted Harvey trick of gaining a hundred pounds and flattening his feet / of course he only had two weeks to do it in —

LUCY. — There would have been a chance of getting a C.O. . . .

In this case, Lucy's cue word is "feet" and she talks over the end of Megan's speech.

## A Narrow Bed

AT RISE: *MEGAN is standing before a closet. She opens the doors. Inside are some men's clothes — just work shirts, flannel shirts, a couple of jackets, maybe some overalls. MEGAN begins to go through the clothing carefully. She smells each shirt, feels it, she might slip a bare foot into one of the shoes. She comes to a jacket, she takes the jacket off the hanger and embraces it. LIGHTS down.*

*Hospital room. WILLIE lies on a hospital bed. LUCY sits next to him.*

WILLIE. It's funny, I keep thinking about . . .

LUCY. Uh huh?

WILLIE. God, these pills. I'm going out again. I don't want to.

LUCY. It's all right.

WILLIE. This thing I keep thinking about . . .

LUCY. Yeah?

WILLIE. You remember we were on a train.

LUCY. When, sweetheart?

WILLIE. Going to . . . we were young, we were going north.

LUCY. Before we were married?

WILLIE. Yes, we were just beginning.

LUCY. Just beginning, yes.

WILLIE. You took my hand as we went into the tunnel and I was amazed . . .

LUCY. (*She remembers*) Yes.

WILLIE. Because you knew . . .

LUCY. Yes.

WILLIE. That I hated the dark. And you spoke to me.  
(*He has fallen asleep. Pause. She watches him sleep.*)

LUCY. I said, "The tunnel always ends." (*She kisses his hand and lays it down carefully. She stands and looks out.*)

(END OF SCENE)

*Lights dim on LUCY and WILLIE as MEGAN replaces the jacket. She takes a hunting rifle out of the closet and holds it loosely, testing its weight. She then lifts it into position and looks down the sights — preferably not at the audience. She puts it back in the closet and takes out a box of letters. She looks through them as she begins to speak.*

MEGAN. My grandmother was from Mississippi. She once told me that you should never watch a loved one depart completely from sight. You should always avert your eyes at the last moment, otherwise you'll never see them again. But I watched your plane until the black spot in the sky dissolved into nothing — I forgot until later. I forgot what she told me. I remembered at about the time you must have been landing in Danang.

(*She has laid the box of letters on the floor, where they remain for the rest of the play. At the end of the speech she is standing. She looks front and begins waving to someone over the audience's heads, as if to a departing car. MEGAN walks over to join LUCY, who also begins waving. They are standing in the living room area, which is bare, except for a few wooden chairs in a circle. The wood floor is ancient and shabby. They look out — as if through the front window.*)

LUCY. Assholes.

MEGAN. (*watches them go over a bump*) Ow. My God, look at how low they're riding. I suppose if they can get out the *driveway* this time of year / they can —

LUCY. I hope the damn thing expires on the George Washington Bridge and they have to *push* it all the way to their fucking condo duplex.

MEGAN. (*amused*) Now, now.

LUCY. Well, for Christ's sake, I leave Willie in the hospital today in order to help these Visigoths sack my home and run off to be lackeys of the ruling class.

MEGAN. Just what we need in this country, more lawyers.

LUCY. I'm sorry you had to deal with them alone all morning.

MEGAN. Well, you saw what it was like, I mean, I really just held the door open, they were incredibly efficient. And look, (*She gestures to the circle of chairs.*) an existential dining room set.

LUCY. Fucking Bobby. I can't believe he took that table.

MEGAN. Well, he made it.

LUCY. Oh, he did not make it. Claudette and what's-his-face, Hugh, made it.

MEGAN. And Bobby. Oh, you remember, Lucy. That first summer — Bobby and Hugh would sit around getting high and throwing carpentry terms around while little Claudette was down in the garage hammering her fingers and singing "Go Tell It on a Mountain." (*They laugh.*) But then, months later, when they inaugurate the damn thing with a huge dinner — Bobby stands up with his wine glass and says, "Now *this* is craftsmanship," and slaps the table for emphasis —

LUCY. — And the leg falls off —

MEGAN. — The fucking leg falls off — (*They have collapsed with laughter.*)

LUCY. Oh God. (*She recovers.*) The bastard took it. He took it. What are we supposed to eat off of?

MEGAN. That's the least of our problems, they also took everything but Kyle's Sesame Street flatware. (*They inadvertently crack up.*)

LUCY. No. Oh my God, all that's left are the Big Bird spoons.

MEGAN. (*as if this makes a difference*) And the Cookie Monster forks.

LUCY. Ah, well, then we're all right. (*pause*) Megan, we've been pillaged.

MEGAN. By a corporate lawyer.

LUCY. It has come to that.

MEGAN. Seems like they kind of lost their grip on the concept of communal property.

LUCY. Apparently. (*Pause; they look around.*)

MEGAN. Oh dear. I'm depressed. I have to admit, I'll miss them. Bobby was very sweet to me.

LUCY. He liked you.

MEGAN. And Maggie's the only one who could ever make jelly that actually gelled. I suppose we drove them out.

LUCY. What? Because we're such bitches? I knew you'd say that. Drove them out? How many years is it they've been hanging on? Maggie only stayed because she couldn't think of what to do next, and I know Bobby only stuck out the last six years or so because he felt guilty.

MEGAN. About what?

LUCY. Oh, you know, about how hard it was for you after John was missing.

MEGAN. Uh huh. Well. (*pause*)

LUCY. I don't know, I don't know — I think Thoreau had a trust fund.

MEGAN. Oh, yeah, he had it easy. Ralph Waldo Emerson had him over for dinner three times a week.

LUCY. Yeah? (*long pause*) Not with a bang but a whimper. So what do we do now?

MEGAN. We can make the mortgage, it's all right.

LUCY. I'm sure we can, somehow we always do. That's not what I'm talking about.

MEGAN. Let's not do this this time. Please.

LUCY. Do what?

MEGAN. Every time someone leaves.

LUCY. Well, I'm sorry, but I just couldn't help but notice that there ain't nobody here but you and me, and you and me do not a commune make is all I'm saying. And yes, there is Willie, but Willie is at present incapacitated, and yes, there is Kyle, but Kyle is three and a half.

MEGAN. I knew we'd go through this again.

LUCY. Oh, fuck it, Megan, stop dealing with me as if I'm throwing a scene here. No, we don't have to decide right now. I can't think about anything with Willie in the hospital anyway — but we do have to figure something out, and soon. And I don't mean new people. I'm too old to start recruiting hippies at this date, and anyway, nobody wants to do this anymore, it's too hard. I mean, we can't keep this farm going by ourselves, Megan, we'll go nuts. It'll be like *Ethan Frome*.

MEGAN. What?

LUCY. Oh, you know. A couple of dried up biddies screaming at each other while some long-suffering man serves them tea.

MEGAN. Where does Kyle fit in?

LUCY. He's the consumptive Dickensian child coughing in the corner.

MEGAN. Ah. So do we get bustles or what?

LUCY. You're missing the point.

MEGAN. I know what the point is, Luce. Really. Look, it's still worth it to me. I'll do the books at the feed store full-time instead of part-time.

LUCY. But see, that's exactly what I'm talking about. I thought the reason you were out here was to write a novel. What's the use of living in the middle of nowhere if, not only do you not have time to write, but you also have to work all day in an office that smells of dead bats?

MEGAN. I was exaggerating.

LUCY. At any rate.

MEGAN. No, actually, that's not why I'm here. Writing the novel has always been secondary to just living on the farm, being part of Common Green.

LUCY. But, Megan, what is Common Green anymore?

MEGAN. So, all right, it's just us. But then we always had the most at stake, so it makes sense that we would be the last hold-outs. Look, I'm not ready to treat what I've been doing for the last fifteen years as if it was some prolonged adolescence that I should grow out of. We were right. This is the best way to live.

LUCY. But you can't mean that you want to go on living *here*, on *this farm*, right? That's not really what you want, is it?

MEGAN. Why should that be so strange to you? Yes, of course that's what I want.

LUCY. I just don't get it. I really don't. For the last few years I've been feeling like we've been maintaining some kind of shrine here for all these people who moved on to

become bankers and guidance counselors and coke fiends, leaving us here to take care of their garden and water their chickens, while they go off to do their lives. It's a fucking ghost house, and I'm tired of feeling like some sort of museum-keeper for other people's nostalgia. I mean, I just got another seed catalogue for Tanya — last time I heard from Tanya was in '72 and she was running a head shop in Sacramento. It's like being the mailing address for a bunch of dead people. And I don't like the fact that you and Willie have had to leave the farm every day to do shit work in order to pay the mortgage. Here's Willie, this guy who was one of the founders of the place because he felt working in an architect's office was unfulfilling, and he's commuting two hours every morning to work in a factory canning beets. This is not what we had in mind. And this old family mythology that I'm the one who always has the *creative* shit jobs, but, I mean, come on — teaching at Alvington Community College is the end of the fucking line — I mean —

MEGAN. — So we get better jobs.

LUCY. But if we're going to get better jobs, why not just —

MEGAN. — Move into the suburbs? Get cute little apartments in Albany? Indeed. Why not? Everytime someone leaves it shakes you completely. It's like you suddenly forget the whole point. You're my family, man, and this is where we live. I love the farm, I feel like this is where I'm supposed to live until I die, *but*, if you and Willie and Kyle were to pick up and leave for the suburbs tomorrow — much as I'd hate to, I'd *get* a little ticky-tacky house next to yours and borrow sugar or come over for coffee on occasional mornings and take Kyle to the circus once a year — I really would, I'd do that, just to keep you in my life. But I would far prefer brushing my

teeth next to you in the morning, cooking dinners together and talking while we shovel shit or pick apples, because I think that's how families work best and I thought that's pretty much what we figured out over the last fifteen years, correct me if I'm wrong.

LUCY. Oh, Meggie. That's not what I'm saying.

MEGAN. So you'll stay? We can stay here?

LUCY. Meggie, you know that you'll never get rid of *me*, that's never been the question. You're going to have to watch my hair turn white and my teeth fall out of my head one by one. But I, it's just *this farm*, is all I'm saying — Don't look at me like that — All right, all right, no, we will not be leaving within the next twenty-four hours.

MEGAN. Good, 'cause it would be hard to manage without Kyle's forks. (*They laugh.*)

LUCY. Oh God, that reminds me, I've got to pick him up.

MEGAN. I could do that, I'm driving past the day-care center anyway.

LUCY. Really?

MEGAN. You going back to the hospital?

LUCY. Eventually. I've got to pick up some research at the library. I'm doing ancient art this week — you know, half an hour on the pyramids, forty-five minutes on Stonehenge — real in-depth stuff — I really have no idea what to say. I've been thinking I might just throw in the towel and go for the ancient astronauts bit.

MEGAN. Which is?

LUCY. Oh, you know — it was real controversial about 10 years ago — the idea that people from outer space came down and took care of business and then left. Gets you off the hook when anyone wants to know how the fuck these people did all this stuff with a couple of ramps and some log-rolling.

MEGAN. Ah.

LUCY. Not that I'm in danger of causing any kind of academic ruckus. The entire lecture hall is generally out cold within five minutes. I mean, I'm out there, saying rather provocative things—occasional pithy quotations and everything—and I suddenly realize I'm pretty much talking to myself. I've decided it must have something to do with the tranquilizing thrum of the projector—or maybe I'm just stultifying.

MEGAN. (*looking at her watch*) I think you've riveting. It is three he gets out?

LUCY. Yeah. (*checking her pockets for keys and wallet*) So we're out of here.

MEGAN. Now, listen, you stay at the hospital as long as you can tonight. Kyle and I can entertain ourselves.

LUCY. I'm sure you can. Well, thank you, I appreciate this. Just keep him away from matches, he's doing this thing now where he either eats them or he lights them and tosses them about / and I can just see the headlines — “Feetsie Pajama Arsonist” —

MEGAN. Oh, I know, he keeps scaring the shit out of me. — “Sets Fire to Satanic Cult Nest.”

LUCY. (*as they are leaving*) I suppose we should consider ourselves lucky Bobby didn't take this door, he made it too.

MEGAN. (*as she closes it*) Never hung right.

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE: *A slide of JOHN taken in Vietnam, is projected at the back of the stage. He is squinting in bright light and smiling. He wears fatigues. The land around him is scorched. He is twenty-two. After a few moments, JOHN, looking as he does in the picture,*

*walks into the light of the projector and looks out toward the audience. He walks toward the front of the stage as the projected image dims. When he gets to the front of the stage, he speaks.*

JOHN. The flight, all told, amounted to about twenty-four hours. Uneventful, except for occasional flurries in which we all set back our watches, in preparation for seeing the sun from the other side around. I thought about you, or I tried *not* to think about you. I slept a lot. In every dream I was back at the farm, worrying about something or other. The cows were getting bloated from eating too much alfalfa, or the onions weren't harvested in time and were rotting in the ground. And then I would wake up, shuddering and sweating about these things, and see all my traveling companions, bullshitting or trading food or reading comic books as we made our way to Vietnam. I would actually feel relief as I went back to the lackadaisical pick-up poker game with a few good-ol-boys from Alabama. Relief. I can't explain this.

"F.N.G." means "Fucking New Guy," as does "freshmeat" — one of the more eloquent terms applied to us within the first twenty minutes after landing. We got the treatment, not just from the officers, who are paid to do this, but from the shoals of departing fellows we were replacing. Jesus, these haggard individuals of twenty, shaking their heads as the cherries get off the plane. Well, of course, we all look like such jerks — painfully recent crew-cuts, spanking new fatigues, reeking of whatever fungus-killer it is that they put on new uniforms. G.I. Joes, fresh out of the package.

(END OF SCENE)

*SCENE: The corridor outside WILLIE's room. A bench. LUCY stands. MEGAN approaches, carrying two paper cups of coffee.*

LUCY. How about we just sit out here and talk? He's sleeping.

MEGAN. Fine. (*hands her a cup*) I guess these things always leak, huh?

LUCY. Always. (*They sit.*) Thanks for coming.

MEGAN. No big deal. (*about the coffee*) God, this is awful.

LUCY. Isn't it? I practically live on it though. I get a kind of constant ringing in my ears by the end of the day if I work on it. Gives me something to do. (*pause*)

MEGAN. So it's definite.

LUCY. What?

MEGAN. The diagnosis.

LUCY. Oh, who knows. Today it's definite, tomorrow maybe they'll think of something else. The problem with this one is that he should be getting better and he's not.

MEGAN. How do you say it? Pancreitis?

LUCY. Pancreatitis. I think. Inflammation of the pancreas. The way they explained it to me this morning, it sounds like what's happening is that the pancreas is actually digesting itself.

MEGAN. Jesus.

LUCY. Yeah. Sounds pretty gothic. But we're supposed to be happy that it's non-surgical, and that they can give him pain-killers, whereas with something else, they couldn't dope him up at all. He's still hurting an awful lot if you ask me. I don't know what to do.

MEGAN. I think you're doing it.

LUCY. Rearranging flowers? Plumping pillows?

MEGAN. Well.

LUCY. I imagine . . . I have this image of myself doing something worthwhile, something heroic, something with a knife in my teeth.

MEGAN. Swinging on ropes.

LUCY. That sort of thing.

MEGAN. I'd like that. I can just see you—chasing nurses down corridors with a saber.

LUCY. Would be fun.

MEGAN. What do you think of the new guy?

LUCY. Oh, I don't know, Megan. It's like talking to a used car salesman. You stop listening to the words after a while and just begin relying on instinct—not the words but the inflection, the tone. Trying to read him.

MEGAN. Do you trust him?

LUCY. So far. He has a scar on his cheek. Sort of an attractive scar, actually, sickle-shaped, under the eye. Apparently his older sister pushed him out of a tree-house. He said she didn't mean to. That's what I'm going on, you understand.

MEGAN. Sounds O.K. to me.

LUCY. You think so?

MEGAN. Sure.

LUCY. Oh, I'd like to believe this guy, Megan, I really would. But I can't help feeling that something is really wrong. I'm much more worried than they lead me to believe I should be. See, he's supposed to be getting better and he's not. That's all I know. The whole message is, you know, a little bedrest, getting him off alcohol and so forth and he'll be fine. But I mean he feels like he's, he feels like he's dying—and they say, oh well, of course, withdrawal, right? But it seems, I just keep thinking they're missing something.

MEGAN. So do you want to move him to Albany?

LUCY. The guy said give him five days, so I'm going to give him five days. He's so sure of himself, this guy. Oh, maybe I'm just totally flipped-out and paranoid. But I just sit there all day and go quietly nutso. I convince myself that they don't know what they're doing, that the diagnosis is wrong — But you know I'm being ridiculous, it's only been a few days, what do I expect, I mean — he'll be fine, he'll be fine. (*pause*)

MEGAN. So what about you?

LUCY. What about me?

MEGAN. How are you getting by?

LUCY. Oh, I just aim for stupidity. I try not to think too much. You know. Cigarettes, coffee . . .

MEGAN. Hot baths?

LUCY. To a certain extent. They tend to promote thought though. You know, you sit in the water and the steam rises and all of a sudden you find yourself thinking. They can be dangerous.

MEGAN. Well, everyone on the floor is crazy about Willie. The nurses just light up when I tell them who I'm coming to see.

LUCY. Oh, yeah. Everyone loves him. Everyone's always loved him. Which is just the way he likes it.

MEGAN. (*confused*) Well, he's a wonderful man.

LUCY. And no dummy either. I was actually surprised when they told me the diagnosis this morning, surprised that he'd ruined his pancreas by drinking, that's how good he is. And when I think about it, you know, he wasn't always everyone's darling, that's something he's had to cultivate over the last ten years because he's needed that many accomplices. And now, he's practically managed to kill himself with a little help from his friends, who just looked the other way and let him go on being drunk, because, after all, he's such a charming

drunk . . . Megan, I'm so angry. The gallons of liquor he's tipped back while I've just watched, because he was amusing, because I thought loving him meant not interfering. And now, to sit there and look at him all day and see what that kind of love has allowed him to do. Of course I'm also so . . . so mad at *him*, I guess. Willie. (*not wanting to cry*) Oh, I don't know, it just seems like such a stupid thing to do to yourself.

MEGAN. It's not that black-and-white.

LUCY. (*dismissing the placation*) I know, Megan, I know. I've read all the brochures from AA, buddy. I realize that it's a disease. But what makes me crazy is this feeling that it's *me* keeping him alive—I think he's letting go, wanting death. It's me, sitting there, holding on to him, talking in my head to his body—'cause it's his *body*—this animal, all nerves and arteries and veins that he has become all of a sudden—that's what I'm dealing with now—his mind is drifting so much of the time. So I sit there, I look down at his arm, and I guess what I do is I pray, I make deals with his arm, I say, "Keep going, please, for me, keep going." (*pause*) God, Megan, I'm so exhausted and I've only been doing this for four days. How could you have done this for fifteen years?

MEGAN. (*surprised*) Well, for one thing I haven't been doing this, what you're doing.

LUCY. But you haven't given up.

MEGAN. How can I? I don't have any choice in this. I can't get any information that says he's alive, but I can't get any that says he's dead. How could I give up?

LUCY. Easy. (*MEGAN shakes her head.*) Another person would.

MEGAN. You'd be surprised. It's just different for me. See, I'm in love with a twenty-two-year-old. Even if John's alive, I'm in love with a ghost, someone who

doesn't exist any longer. You, you have this person, right in front of you, you can touch him, smell him, hold him, the pain he's going through is something you can see. You don't have to believe anyone else, doctors, nurses, anyone, the truth is right there. I'm just so tired of having to take someone else's word for everything. If I could go there, of course I can't go there — but if I could just *touch* something . . . Well, anyway . . . I didn't mean to, I don't mean to say that what I'm going through . . . what you're going through is in some ways / a lot worse . . .

LUCY. I know that. We're not doing comparative suffering here. I know —

MEGAN. I mean, for one thing, you have to deal with the day-to-day struggle of keeping a marriage working, / whereas —

LUCY. And you haven't slept with anyone for 15 years.

MEGAN. (*pause*) You don't know that.

LUCY. What?

MEGAN. You don't know that.

LUCY. Yes, I do. I mean — don't I?

MEGAN. I did.

LUCY. Who? (*pause*) Of course, you don't have to tell me. (*pause*) Except that you do . . . have to tell me.

MEGAN. (*laughs*) All right. All right. There was this guy I saw waiting for a bus. He . . . well, I was really shocked. He looked a lot, I mean *a lot* like John. I saw him from across the street. I was holding all these groceries and I just stood there staring at him like a crazy person. He didn't know I was watching him because he was doing this, well actually, this very *John*-thing, as a matter of fact — he was reading the back of his ticket. That's just what John used to do — he'd read things, the wrappers on candy bars, airplane safety folders, cereal

boxes, baggage tickets . . . anyway the guy didn't notice me. But I just couldn't move. I knew it wasn't John but I couldn't seem to convince myself. There was this child in me, this little girl jumping up and down saying "It's him, it's him, he's come back!" Finally I did this thing. I crossed the street and I went up to him. I said, "Excuse me, but I have a sort of unusual request. I'll pay for that ticket, wherever you're going, if you would sit and talk with me for a few minutes." He said, "You'd pay for a ticket to Chicago just to talk?" I said, "You're right, it's not just to talk. You'd have to kiss me." He said something like "What is this?" and then I told him. I showed him a picture of John. He saw the likeness. Anyway . . . anyway, I asked him to come out with me someplace. We turned in the ticket. It was all pretty weird, actually.

LUCY. I bet.

MEGAN. I sort of didn't want to talk, because it would spoil the illusion. But then the illusion wasn't all that pleasant anyway.

LUCY. You made love?

MEGAN. Yeah, got my diaphragm out of the crypt and everything — which meant I had to sneak into the house while he sat in the car. But luckily the whole place was on the Saturday family acid trip and no one noticed.

LUCY. Where did you go?

MEGAN. We took a cabin at the Whispering Pines for about an hour and a half.

LUCY. (*appalled*) Oh my God.

MEGAN. Yeah. It was *beyond* seedy. This bowed mattress on the bed and these incredibly loud springs and the whole place smelling like you were inside an Airwick freshener. Oy. I mean, Lucy. This poor guy. I don't know why he did it — but I'm sure he regretted it as soon as we

decided to. And he's trying to deal with *me* and I can't even *look* at him. He probably felt like a stud. A bad stud at that. I kept crying. (*She laughs.*)

LUCY. (*horrified but laughing*) That's awful.

MEGAN. I know.

LUCY. Is that the only time?

MEGAN. Well, yeah. I mean, I made out with Woody a couple of times.

LUCY. — Oh, well, who didn't? Woody was . . . Jesus, Megan.

MEGAN. Yeah.

LUCY. Do you masturbate a lot?

MEGAN. You're a nosey son-of-a-bitch, aren't you?

LUCY. Well, I don't know. I just don't know how you do it.

MEGAN. I used to. I still do, it's just . . . I think about John, you know, to get excited and after this long—

LUCY. — You can't remember?—

MEGAN. — No, no, I remember all right. I just feel, it's been so long, I feel like a what-do-you-call-it—necrophiliac. No, that's not what I mean, I feel. . . . It makes me sad. It's worse. It makes me crazy. But that's just the way it is.

LUCY. So you still think he's alive.

MEGAN. I don't really want to talk / about it again.

LUCY. (*hands up*) All right, all right. (*pause*)

MEGAN. I don't really *think* anything, it's not that sort of thing. At this point, even though he hasn't shown up on any of the lists—he's legally dead. It's completely irrational to think he might still be alive, I know that. (*pause*) But Lucy, maybe I'm just doing this to myself—you know, some new kind of self-torture, but I . . . Last week I was doing the dishes and, for no reason at all I had this very clear memory—it wasn't a memory,

it was a feeling. See, John had this way of pulling on his nose and scratching it at the same time. It was a habitual gesture. He did it when he was confused or when he couldn't think of what to say. So I was standing there at the sink and I suddenly knew, I really *knew* that he had just made that gesture. That he must be alive. I know it sounds —

LUCY. — No it doesn't. I believe you.

MEGAN. You don't think I'm . . .

LUCY. — No I don't. (*pause*)

MEGAN. So anyway. That's how I do it.

LUCY. Do what?

MEGAN. You asked how I keep living.

(END OF SCENE)

*SCENE: WILLIE's room. A NURSE is sitting with him.*

WILLIE. So that's it?

NURSE. What?

WILLIE. There's only the two?

NURSE. — Well —

WILLIE. — There's no C type personality?

NURSE. What do you mean?

WILLIE. Oh, you know, for people who like cats, tend to get nosebleeds, would prefer to go fishing?

NURSE. Not that I know of.

WILLIE. Not that you know of? Only A and B. Just heart attacks and cancer — that's it — the whole shooting match.

NURSE. These things are just conceptual tools —

WILLIE. — No, no, no, they are far more than conceptual tools — uh, uh — they are very dangerous things indeed. They are little rosaries for people who aren't sick,

you can fondle your A and B theory and say “Oh, I’m not constipated, I don’t repress my feelings, I’m not burdened with guilt and fear, *ergo* I’m not going to die of cancer—I’m too hip to myself to die of cancer. These other fools dying—oh, they just don’t know how to express anger” or whatever it is. Or: “I’m calm, laid-back, reasonable in my ambitions, I’m not orally-fixated, *ergo* I’m not going to die of a heart attack.” It’s this psychological smugness I’m talking about. I wish we were still in the days when people wore garlic around their necks and walked backwards on Wednesdays or whatever to ward off evil—I mean at least then we were a bit more humble in the face of what we feared the most, what we have no control over.

NURSE. We have some control.

WILLIE. Oh really? Well, may I ask you which type *you* are?

NURSE. I’m A. (*Pause; WILLIE laughs.*)

WILLIE. You weren’t supposed to say that. (*pause*) You really believe this stuff?

NURSE. It’s not a question of *believing*. Not everybody has a type, and often times types are misleading. These are just very vague theories, but they are not without some value, just as different ways of looking at basic human behavior.

WILLIE. So you’re saying you’re going to die of a heart attack?

NURSE. I don’t know. I hope not. But at least I know what to watch out for.

WILLIE. What type do you think I am?

NURSE. Well—

WILLIE. —On second thought, don’t tell me. I’d just as soon not hear it. Gosh, it seems Fate doesn’t have

much of a hand in things anymore, not like the old days. Now, on top of being sick, you have to be embarrassed for being sick at all, now it's just a symptom of how un-hip you are. And when I think of the people I know — there are an awful lot of very messed-up people walking around out there while I'm in here, they're walking around — and I mean *deluded*, and they don't even have a head-cold, while I'm sitting here in a lot, I really am in a lot of pain right now, did you know that?

NURSE. Yes, that's why I'm here.

WILLIE. (*The light breaks.*) Oh, I see, you're here to *cheer me up*, is that right? You're here, talking to me about which way I'm likely to kick the bucket to *make me feel better*, I see, of course. (*She is laughing.*) I know, I started it. I asked you a few questions, *but you answered them*, didn't you? Quite the bed-side manner. (*pause*) You're not here to give me drugs. (*She shakes her head.*) You have no drugs to give me. (*She shakes her head.*) Have you decided I'm a junkie? Is that it? Are you the one who decided I was an alcoholic? No? Somebody did. 'Cause now I've got this neat problem, "the drunkard's disease" I've heard it's called. You sure you didn't decide that?

NURSE. Nobody decided. You told us.

WILLIE. I did?

NURSE. You answered some questions about how much you drink when you were first admitted. According to that and to what effect you said liquor has on you, you're an alcoholic. And, of course, there's evidence of that all through your body.

WILLIE. I'll be darned. You learn so much about yourself in a hospital.

NURSE. You knew that.

WILLIE. Only when I was sober. (*The joke doesn't have*

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