Acting Edition

The Cemetery Club

by Ivan Menchell

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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to the memory and laughter
that was my father, Lou

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The Cemetery Club was originally produced as a work in progress by The Yale Repertory Theatre as part of Winterfest 7 on January 13, 1987. The production was directed by William Glenn, dramaturged by Jeff Magnin, and stage managed by Tom Aberger. The scenery was designed by Tamara Turchetta; costumes by Dunya Ramicova; lighting by Michael R. Chybowsky; sound by Ross S. Richards. The cast was as follows:

IDA..... Patricia Englund
LUCILLE..... Sylvia Miles
DORIS..... Vera Lockwood
SAM..... Rod Colbin

The Cemetery Club was subsequently produced at The Cleveland Playhouse on May 16, 1989. The production was directed by Josephine R. Abady, dramaturged by Roger T. Danforth, and stage managed by Robert S. Garber. The scenery was designed by David Potts; costumes by Jane Greenwood and David Charles; lighting by Dennis Parichy; sound by Lia Vollack. The cast was as follows:

IDA.....Elizabeth Franz
LUCILLE.....Nanette Fabray
DORIS.....Doris Belack
SAM.....Eugene Troobnick
MILDRED.....Joyce Krempel

The Cemetery Club was subsequently produced at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Eisenhower Theatre on March 30, 1990. The production was presented by Howard Hurst, Philip Rose, Sophie Hurst and David Brown under the direction of Pamela Berlin and stage managed by Barbara-Mae Phillips. The scenery was designed by John Lee Beatty; costumes by Lindsay W. Davis; lighting by Natasha Katz; sound by Scott T. Anderson with music by Robert Dennis. The cast was as follows:

IDA.....Elizabeth Franz
LUCILLE.....Eileen Heckart
DORIS.....Doris Belack
SAM.....Lee Wallace
MILDRED.....Judith Granite

The production was then moved to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre in New York where it opened on May 12, 1990.

CHARACTERS

IDA
LUCILLE
DORIS
SAM
MILDRED

They are all in their late fifties to early sixties.

TIME

The time is mid-Autumn. The present.

PLACE

The action of the play takes place in the living room of Ida's house and at a cemetery in Forest Hills, Queens.

ACT I

Scene 1

SCENE: Ida's living room. The front door is USL leading to an open hallway running across the stage. USC is a staircase leading to the bedrooms. USR, at the opposite end of the hallway, is a chair and small desk on which is the telephone. On the upstage wall, bedside the door, is a hanging mirror and shelf. The living room is sunken DS of the hallway with a bay window SL looking out on to the street and an exit off right to the kitchen. There is also a curtained window in the wall USL that looks out on to the front porch and under which is the hi-fi. Separating the sunken living room from the hallway are some columns and a small bookshelf DS of the stairs. Just right of center is a couch with an end table, a chair and a coffee table. Left of the couch is an armchair with ottoman and a small humidor on which is a pipe rack and ash tray. In the bay window area is an upright piano and lamp. The piano is covered with framed photos of Ida's family. Downstage of the kitchen exit is a large side-board filled with knickknacks and dishes.

AT RISE: IDA comes down the stairs into the living room. The DOORBELL rings. As SHE goes to answer the door the OVEN TIMER rings offstage in the kitchen. SHE heads for the kitchen and the DOORBELL rings again. SHE's about to turn back for the door but decides that what's in the oven is more important. SHE exits to the kitchen. The DOORBELL rings again.

IDA. (*Offstage.*) Coming. Coming.

(*The DOORBELL rings again. IDA runs on holding her oven mitts.*)

IDA. I'm coming. (*Going for the door as the BELL rings again.*) *I'm coming!*

(*SHE opens the door. LUCILLE bursts in wearing a long fur coat.*)

LUCILLE. Son of a bitch!

IDA. What's the matter?!

LUCILLE. A guy follows me all the way from Queens Boulevard, undressing me with his eyes, and she asks what's the matter.

IDA. Again someone was following you?

LUCILLE. Can I help it if men find me attractive?

IDA. Who was it this time?

LUCILLE. I didn't get a name. He had blond hair, six one, six two, about a hundred seventy

pounds—a very nice build—with green eyes and a cleft chin—

IDA. What were you, walking backwards?

LUCILLE. I happen to have an excellent memory ... So what do you think?

IDA. I think you should just forget the whole thing.

LUCILLE. I mean about the *coat*. Look at this how she doesn't even notice.

IDA. Oh Lucille, it's beautiful. New?

LUCILLE. Have you seen it on this gorgeous body before?

IDA. You should wear it in the best of health.

LUCILLE. You ready for the best part? Guess how much.

IDA. A coat like that you must have paid at least three thousand.

LUCILLE. Nope.

IDA. Less?

LUCILLE. Much.

IDA. What, twenty-five hundred?

(*LUCILLE joyously shakes her head.*)

IDA. Don't tell me it was under two thousand.

LUCILLE. *Nineteen fifty*.

IDA. I'm fainting.

LUCILLE. Is that a steal or is that a steal?

IDA. Where did you find it?

LUCILLE. Well, I was walking in Manhattan down Fifty-seventh Street when I pass the Ritz Thrift Shop. Usually, I would never even look in

the window. I mean, what could they have—garbage, right? This time I happen to look and what do you think I see?

IDA. That coat.

LUCILLE. No. I see a full length brown fox you could die from. I go in, try it on and my mazel it's a little too tigh— (*She's about to say "tight" but stops herself.*)—short. Then as I'm walking out, I'm looking down the rack and what do you think catches my eye?

IDA. That coat.

LUCILLE. A leopard jacket that made my heart stop. But for how often I'd get to wear it, it didn't pay.

IDA. Lucille, we're not getting any younger. Where did you find the mink?

LUCILLE. So, as I'm about to leave I see them bringing in a new rack and what do you think is the first thing I spot?

IDA. Who knows?

LUCILLE. This coat.

IDA. Thank God.

LUCILLE. There's only one thing that bothers me.

IDA. What?

LUCILLE. Knowing it was someone else's. I mean, who knows who this person is? All I know is that she's tall, terrifically slim and probably didn't look half as good in it as I do.

IDA. So what are you worried? You got a gorgeous coat at a great price.

LUCILLE. Ida, why would she give this coat up?

IDA. Who knows? Maybe she died.

LUCILLE. Oh my God. I didn't even think. This poor woman could be dead. For all I know, she could have died in this coat. The poor thing could've been wearing this coat, crossing the street and got hit by a car. It's not marked anywhere, is it? (*SHE turns around to show Ida the back of the coat.*)

IDA. It's perfect. Not a scratch on it ... except for that one tire mark down the back.

LUCILLE. Oh!

IDA. I'm only kidding. There's nothing on it. Let me try it on.

LUCILLE. My pleasure.

(*LUCILLE takes off the coat and gives it to Ida. SHE puts it on.*)

IDA. How do I look?

LUCILLE. Do the words "Lana Turner" mean anything?

IDA. Let me see.

(*SHE runs over to the mirror and looks at herself. LUCILLE stands behind her.*)

LUCILLE. What becomes a legend most!

IDA. (*Embarrassed.*) Oh ...

LUCILLE. Maybe I'll take a look, see if they have another one. Picture the two of us out on the town, fur from head to toe.

IDA. It's not me.

LUCILLE. All the more reason.

IDA. I don't need it. (*SHE takes off the coat and hangs it up.*)

LUCILLE. Ida, no one buys a mink because they need it. You buy support hose because you need it. You buy a mink because you *want* it.

IDA. I don't want it. Besides, I couldn't afford it. Where did *you* get two thousand dollars?

LUCILLE. One of Harry's Municipals Bonds came due.

IDA. Well, congratulations. How about some tea?

LUCILLE. Love it.

IDA. I'll put the water up.

(*SHE exits to the kitchen. LUCILLE hangs the coat in the closet.*)

LUCILLE. I want you to know I broke a pretty hot date to come here today.

IDA. (*Offstage.*) Who you got now?

LUCILLE. His name's Donald. Ida, if I tell you.

IDA. Good looking?

LUCILLE. *Gorgeous ...* (*Nonchalantly looking through Ida's mail.*) and a gentleman. Opens the door, pulls out the chair, picks up the check. We had a night Friday you wouldn't

believe. Dinner, dancing, a hansom cab ride through Central Park.

IDA. (*Reenters.*) How romantic.

LUCILLE. And he didn't leave me alone all night. Hands everywhere.

IDA. No.

LUCILLE. Yeah.

IDA. So when do I meet him already?

LUCILLE. You'll meet him.

IDA. You never stay with one long enough for me to meet them.

LUCILLE. I'll tell you what – if we're still together next week I'll have him stop by during canasta. And what about you? When am I going to start hearing about a little romance, a little excitement?

IDA. When it happens you'll hear about it.

LUCILLE. I'm all ready to start double dating. I can't keep taking out two men by myself.

IDA. Why, they get tired?

(*THEY laugh.*)

LUCILLE. I'm serious, Ida. I'm waiting for you to join me. God knows Doris is never going to start.

IDA. I wonder where she is. It's after eleven. I figured she would've been here early. Today's an important day for her.

LUCILLE. It's always important to Doris. This is the high point of the month for her. She thinks

about it for two weeks after and starts getting ready two weeks before. It's like a vicious cycle.

IDA. Sometimes a cycle is important. You know what to expect.

LUCILLE. Well, my cycle ended more years ago than I care to remember and that hasn't stopped me.

IDA. I just hope today goes well, I can't believe it's already her fourth anniversary.

LUCILLE. *Today's* her fourth anniversary? I completely forgot.

IDA. How could you?

LUCILLE. I can't keep up with the dates anymore.

IDA. You really should try.

LUCILLE. Sometimes I think we should stop this whole business altogether.

IDA. Lucille.

LUCILLE. I do.

IDA. ... I don't know myself anymore.

LUCILLE. You see.

IDA. So why do you keep coming?

LUCILLE. Don't think I haven't asked myself.

IDA. I'm serious.

LUCILLE. I like this time together.

(*IDA smiles.*)

LUCILLE. But I'm sure there's other ways we could spend the afternoon.

(*The DOORBELL rings.*)

IDA. (*Going to the door.*) Well don't bring it up today.

LUCILLE. I wouldn't say a word. Whatever she wants to talk, we'll talk.

IDA. You're a good friend.

LUCILLE. The best.

(*IDA opens the door. DORIS enters wearing a dark skirt suit and hat and carries a coat over her arm and a small folding stool.*)

IDA. Where have you been?

DORIS. Fine thank you and how are you?

(*THEY kiss hello.*)

LUCILLE. We've been worried sick here.

IDA. What took you so long?

DORIS. I overslept

IDA. *Today?*

(*DORIS and LUCILLE kiss.*)

DORIS. I didn't sleep too good last night. Did you get another bill for perpetual care?

IDA. You mean besides the one in the spring?

DORIS. Yeah.

IDA. No.

DORIS. (*To Lucille.*) How about you?

LUCILLE. I haven't paid the spring one yet. When Blue Cross pays *me* for Harry being sick I'll pay the *cemetery* for Harry being dead.

DORIS. Well, you'll probably get yours Monday. I'm not even going to tell you how high it's gone up.

IDA. Again it's gone up?

LUCILLE. And what are they going to do if we don't pay? What, they going to move them?

(*The tea KETTLE whistles.*)

DORIS. You want me to make?

IDA. Sit. I'll get it.

(*IDA exits to the kitchen. DORIS hangs up her coat then joins Lucille on the couch.*)

DORIS. So how are you?

LUCILLE. Good. You look different.

DORIS. I dropped a couple of pounds.

LUCILLE. You're losing weight?

DORIS. No, it's just moving lower. So what do you think of this day?

LUCILLE. Nice.

DORIS. Nice? A more beautiful day hasn't been invented. The leaves are just starting to fall. The colors are incredible. Abe's plot is going to look gorgeous. I just hope they kept up the care. You remember the argument I had with them last month. He's telling me they water twice a week while I'm looking down at dead ivy.

LUCILLE. I'm sure it'll look terrific.

DORIS. Funny, you know, fall was Abe's favorite time of year.... Eh, a wonderful man taken much too soon.

LUCILLE. Who could believe? *Four years ago today.*

DORIS. You remembered. I didn't think you'd remember.

LUCILLE. Of course I remembered. How could I forget? It was almost exactly a year before my Harry died.

DORIS. That's Murry.

LUCILLE. What's Murry?

DORIS. Murry. *Ida's* Murry. *He* died the year before your Harry.

LUCILLE. *Murry* died the year before Harry?

DORIS. Of course, Abe died two years before Murry.

LUCILLE. So Harry died three years after Abe.

DORIS. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

LUCILLE. So who died the year before Murry?

DORIS. No one.

LUCILLE. You sure?

DORIS. Of course I'm sure! Abe died four years ago today.

LUCILLE. That's what I said. Four years ago today. Who could forget? A wonderful man taken much too soon.

DORIS. They were all wonderful men. I wonder what the three of them are doing now?

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