

A Red Plaid Shirt

By

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CAST

All are late 50's to mid 60's

MARTY: A retired High School English teacher

DEB: A retired woman. Marty's wife

FRED BAXTER: friend of Marty and Deb, Gladys's husband. Also retired.

GLADYS BAXTER: friend of Marty and Deb, Fred's wife. Also retired

ACT ONE SCENE 1

PLACE: A living room

TIME: Noon

Lights up on a living room. There is a door to the outside on the upstage wall. A coat tree is stage left of the door. A curtained window is upstage centre. The room is furnished simply and is neat and clean. There is a couch centre stage with a coffee table in front of it. There is a door leading to the kitchen stage left and a hallway stage right leading to the bedrooms and the rest of the house. There are one or two arm chairs in the area. There are other items of furniture that would normally be seen in a living room along with a drink cart or cabinet, MARTY is sitting on the couch doing a crossword puzzle and wearing a pair of reading glasses

MARTY: *(yells)* Deb! *(pause)* Debbie!

DEB enters. She is about the same age as Marty.

DEB: You don't have to holler, I'm right here.

MARTY: Then why didn't you say something?

DEB: What do you want Marty?

MARTY: What's a seven letter word meaning "retired"

DEB: Annoying.

MARTY: *(counts)* That's eight letters.

DEB: Be creative, spell it with only one "N".

She picks up a plate from the coffee table.

And if you're going to eat your lunch in the living room, can you at least take your plate into the kitchen.

MARTY: Oh sorry, here I'll take care of it.

He takes the plate from her and puts it back on the coffee table

What about a eight letter word that begins with "P" ends with "E" and the fourth letter is "L".

DEB: What's the clue?

MARTY: I don't know, I crossed it out accidentally. The clue starts with a "U" and ends with an "E- D". What do you think it is?

DEB: No idea.

MARTY: Unraveled?

DEB: Maybe.

MARTY: Unrivalled?

DEB: How about: "Uninterested". What do you plan on doing today?

MARTY: What appears to be my lot in life now, holding down the couch.

DEB: Is that it?

MARTY: Somebody has to do it, you'd be the first one to complain if the couch went missing. But, I'm willing to risk losing the couch by taking my beautiful wife out to dinner , what do you say?

DEB: You can't.

MARTY: Why not?

DEB: You invited the Baxters over tonight.

MARTY: I did? When?

DEB: Last week when we bumped into them at the grocery store.

MARTY: Oh yeah. What time?

DEB: Eight o'clock.

MARTY: Why so late?

DEB: Marty, let's just figure out what we're going to serve tonight. Doesn't have to be anything fancy which is just as well because it's your turn to cook.

MARTY: I can't cook for Fred, he's too finicky.

DEB: You've been friends for thirty years; you must know what he likes.

MARTY: I did, until he retired. Since then he's gone all weird. He has a rotating schedule of food allergies.

DEB: What's his problem, Gladys say he won't even travel anymore.

MARTY: I know, he claims airplanes are just flying germ tubes.

DEB: Fine, just find out what he's OK with this week.

MARTY: His current ailments usually depend on what medical show he's been watching; I'll check the TV listings. Or, we could just ask him to bring his own food.

DEB: Don't be ridiculous!

MARTY: I think it's a great idea. We have to economize now; I'm on a fixed income.

DEB: So you're allowed to be cheap now you're a pensioner?

MARTY: I am, aren't I?

DEB: What, cheap?

MARTY: No, a pensioner. I feel too good to be a pensioner. Had I known I'd feel so good at this time of life, I would have aged a lot sooner, I think I wasted too much time being young.

DEB: I didn't waste my time being young, I enjoyed every last second of it.

MARTY: You did?

DEB: You should know, you were there for most of it.

MARTY: Oh yeah.

DEB: So, besides holding down the couch, anything planned for today? You'll have most of the afternoon to yourself, Shirley and I have a Library Ladies meeting.

MARTY: My day is open, I'll drive you.

DEB: Nope, Shirley's picking me up at quarter to three.

MARTY: OK, I'll drive you home then.

DEB: No, I'll just get Shirley to drop me off; it's on her way.

MARTY: Why don't I come to the meeting with you? If I know something about anything it's books.

DEB: Honey I love you, but you'd just feel out of place, nobody else brings their husbands. Besides, we're discussing the menu for the year end luncheon.

MARTY: I could help with that, I also know something about eating.

DEB: How much potato salad do you need to feed thirty people?

MARTY: *(pause)* Lots?

DEB: Or you can stay home and figure out what we're going to feed the Baxters.

MARTY: I guess.

Marty puts his feet up on the coffee table

I don't know why we can't just order take out from the Chopstick House.

DEB: Feet off the furniture.

MARTY: Oh come on...

DEB: That's what floors are for. Just because you're home all the time now doesn't mean you can turn my world inside out.

MARTY: I wish I'd retired first, then I could make the rules.

He wiggles his feet back and forth on the coffee table.

Hey, what's wrong with this table?

DEB: Nothings wrong with it.

He wiggles his feet back and forth again.

MARTY: It's all wiggly.

DEB: It's always been like that.

MARTY: No it hasn't.

DEB: It's wiggly because you're wiggling it!

MARTY: I think the legs are loose.

DEB: It's fine, don't bother about it.

MARTY: No, there's something definitely wrong , I'll have a look at it...

DEB: Honey, it's been like that for years, if you just leave it alone, nothing bad will happen.

MARTY: It's just a table, what's the worst that could happen?

DEB: Honey, I love you but you're just not handy.

MARTY: Thirty five years as an English teacher doesn't exactly prepare one to tackle home repairs, but maybe now it's time to learn how to use my own two hands, to do what a man does.

DEB: Fine, go to the garage, drink beer and stare at the cars' engine. This is something you're not equipped to handle.

MARTY: It's not my fault, the manly arts took a back seat to trying to knock the word "like" out of every sentence my students used.

DEB: *(seductively)* When it came to the "manly arts" I never like... complained did I?

MARTY: Quit trying to butter me up and annoy me at the same time. Come on, this job is a piece of cake.

DEB: Marty, admit it. The only piece of cake that you handle with any confidence is an actual piece of cake.

MARTY: I have to start somewhere.

DEB: (pause) OK, but no glue!

MARTY: I can't promise that.

DEB: Then maybe I'd better help.

MARTY: Nope, step aside please, Mr. Handyman is in control.

DEB: Alright.

Deb steps off to the side. Marty doesn't move.

MARTY: (pause) Do we have any tools?

DEB: Yes

MARTY: Where are they?

DEB: In the kitchen drawer beside the stove, Mr. Handyman.

MARTY: All of them?

DEB: Yep. What do you need? A frapplewrench? A left handed hammer?

MARTY: Very funny, I think I can handle this myself.

Marty starts to exit to the kitchen.

DEB: Plate!

MARTY: Right!

He returns, picks the plate up from the coffee table and exits to the kitchen. We hear him rummaging through the drawer.

DEB: Just so you know, whatever you break, we're paying our guy thirty dollars an hour to fix.

Marty returns holding a pipe wrench

MARTY: What? That's how much we've been paying that guy?

DEB: Yep.

MARTY: All the more reason for me to take over .

DEB: *(picking up the phone)* Do you mind if I dial the “nine” and the “one” right now just to save time?

MARTY: *(turns the coffee table on its side)* You have nothing to worry about, this is under control.

Marty examines each leg in turn

Uh huh... yep... this looks simple enough.... I can't believe we'd pay somebody thirty bucks an hour just to handle this... These three legs look sturdy enough... AH! Here's the problem, there seems to be a screw loose.

DEB: Just one?

MARTY: This leg just needs to be tightened a little.

He tries to tighten it with the pipe wrench

DEB: Marty, maybe you should just call our guy and...

The leg snaps off in his hands.

... have it fixed properly.

MARTY: *(he examines the leg)* This wood is obviously faulty, I just tried to tighten it and it snapped off like a dry twig.

DEB: You used a PIPEwrench! It's supposed to be used on pipes!

MARTY: Oh. Why didn't you say something?

DEB: I was afraid for the pipes.

MARTY: OK, this is fixable, where's the superglue?

DEB: No glue! *(grabs the pipewrench)* and give me that before you poke your eye out. Thank goodness we don't have grandchildren yet, I can't imagine a little guy following you around copying everything you do.

MARTY: Yeah, but wouldn't it be great?

DEB: *(smiling)* Oh yeah! I wish they'd get busy.

MARTY: Well by the time that happens, I'll be ready. *(he half heartedly kicks the coffee table)* This thing is no help; I don't know why it didn't come with a manual.

DEB: Maybe they didn't anticipate it stumping anybody.

MARTY: It's poorly designed.

DEB: Don't worry about the coffee table. Take it away before I trip over it and break my neck.

Marty takes the coffee table offstage

I tell you what, let's get rid of it, I never liked it anyway and besides, coffee tables are out of fashion, the kids don't have one

MARTY: (*re-enters*) The kids don't have a coffee table because they don't drink real coffee anymore and there's no such thing as a skinny latte, no foam, half caf "whoop de doo" table.

DEB: If we leave it like this, it opens up the room, gives it better Feng Shui.

MARTY: Is that something we want?

DEB: Feng Shui promotes a good positive energy flow, it's all about the placement of the furniture. Last week the Library Ladies discussed a Feng Shui book and I discovered the energy of this room doesn't flow well and we're not harmonizing with our environment.

MARTY: Sounds harmless. Fine, you take care of the energy flow but I want a coffee table, I need a place to put my magazines, the remote control...

DEB: Your feet.

MARTY Exactly.

DEB: OK, fine, get a new one.

MARTY: What about the Feng Shways?

Deb takes an arm chair and turns it at an angle.

DEB: There, that oughta do it.

MARTY: I don't feel anything.

DEB: You just worry about a new coffee table.... but nothing with a glass top or brass legs or anything ugly. On second thought, I'm coming with you.

MARTY: I'm retired, not useless! I'm perfectly capable of picking out a coffee table.

DEB: I know you're perfectly capable of picking out a coffee table. It's just the coffee table you might eventually pick out that concerns me.

MARTY: Why can't I be responsible for this one thing? So far, all I've done is hold down the couch. After six months of retirement, you know what the highlight has been? Walking down to the coffee shop to trade medical horror stories with the local geezer group.

DEB: You have medical horror stories?

MARTY: No, but I can tell you all about their bowel movement schedules, the state of everyone's prostate and I can even draw you a picture of Fred Baxter's surgical scar. The purple one. The one he'll probably show us again tonight.

DEB: And you learned all this while eating an apple fritter.

MARTY: It's not easy, let me tell you.

DEB: I thought you were enjoying retirement?

MARTY: I am sort of, but... I'm drifting Deb, I have no purpose. So I wander down to the coffee shop, say hello to the same bunch of guys at the same time every Thursday and think "My God, is that going to be me? *Is that me?*" I'm being sucked into discussions about plastic hips.

DEB: There's nothing we can do about it Marty, we're getting older and the things that matter in our lives change. Of course they talk about plastic hips and their "schedules" because that's what's happening in their lives. What are they supposed to talk about, their latest sexual conquests? *(pause)* You don't talk about that do you?

MARTY: No, we try to stick to *current* events.

DEB: Honey, it feels strange now because you've just left your job, your identity behind. You'll find something new, trust me.

MARTY: Really? What... when... where?

DEB: OK, let's figure this out. What do you like to do.

MARTY: Read.

DEB: No, I mean an activity, something to occupy you. How about golf? I'd learn and we could...

MARTY: *(interrupting)* I've never played in my life and have no desire to.

DEB: How about taking some of those adult education classes at the high school?

MARTY: The high school? I spent thirty-five years there, I've darkened its door for the last time.

DEB: Come with me to the Seniors Centre they have lots of ...

MARTY: Crokinole, bridge and lawn bowling. No, No and not a hope in hell.

DEB: Well think about what you want to do. Maybe a learn a new skill, a new language, or try volunteering at the recreation centre, they need...

MARTY: *(interrupting)* Wait, what was that?

DEB: Try volunteering?

MARTY: No, of course not.... what was the first one, the one about learning something....

DEB: Learning a new skill?

MARTY: That's it, I can learn a new skill!

DEB: Great! What do you want to do?

MARTY: I don't know, what are some things I'm not good at, you know, some skills I don't have.

DEB: Somebody pass me a gun, I just found a barrel full of fish.

MARTY: Maybe hunting!

DEB: Hunting? Are you insane?

MARTY: Welding!

DEB: Flames and hot metal.

MARTY: Taxidermy!

DEB: Don't even think about.

MARTY: Skydiving!

DEB: Shut up! You actually want to do those things?

MARTY: No, I'm brainstorming.

DEB: Well, there has to be a million things you can do safely. Like.... water colours, we could turn the spare room into a studio!

MARTY: I don't want to paint anything. I can't even draw stick people.

DEB: I know, pottery!

MARTY: The world does not need another lopsided vase.

DEB: OK, then you come up with something that won't kill you or anybody around you.

MARTY: How about something with practical applications, maybe woodworking.

DEB: Not a chance!

MARTY: Why not?

DEB: You'll saw your hand off.

MARTY: OK ... I'll buy a motorcycle.

DEB: You said that just so woodworking wouldn't sound so bad, didn't you?

MARTY: I don't know...

DEB: I don't have the energy for this. Is woodworking what you really want to do?

MARTY: *(pause)* I've been thinking a lot about motorcycles.

DEB: You can't be serious.

MARTY: Maybe. It's always seemed to me to be a crazy, devil may care thing to do.

DEB: The operative word being "crazy".

MARTY: Haven't you ever wondered what it would feel like to ride a motorcycle?

DEB: No.

MARTY: Well I have.

DEB: I'll tell you what, if you want to know what it would feel like if *you* rode a motorcycle, I'll drag you behind the car and save you the trouble and expense of falling off one.

MARTY: I could learn!

DEB: You're getting a motorcycle over *your* dead body.

MARTY: So, if the motorcycle doesn't kill me, you will.

DEB: You're catching on.

MARTY: Don't tell me what to do Deb, because you know from hard experience that telling me what to do just means it'll take me a little longer to do it.

DEB: Marty, I can't believe you're serious about this.

MARTY: I told you, I'm drifting! If I don't find something to occupy myself, I'll fall in with a bad crowd and become a senior delinquent.

DEB:unless you buy motorcycle and a black leather jacket.

MARTY: Would you feel better if it were plaid?

DEB: Listen.... what was the other thing you mentioned?

MARTY: Woodworking.

DEB: Why woodworking?

MARTY: I guess because it's so basic and honest. A man, tools, and wood. It's how life began.

DEB: Of course, that came to light in nineteen twenty-five when geologists found that first fossilized band saw.

MARTY: It's the appeal of creating something tangible, something practical. I could build something we could actually use.

DEB: Like what?

MARTY: A new coffee table.

DEB: Or, you could start by building something simple, like a stick.

MARTY: So you're OK with woodworking?

DEB: You'll be careful?

MARTY: Of course I will and you'll see, I'll build us something amazing.

DEB: Honey, I'll be happy if you come home with both your hands still attached to your wrists.

MARTY: Ok, well, woodworking it is. The high school runs classes in the evening, I'll sign up and...

DEB: I thought you vowed never to darken that door again.

MARTY: It's in a whole different wing, I've never gone in that door before.

DEB: Promise you won't saw your hand off?

MARTY: Promise!

DEB: No more talk of motorcycles?

MARTY: *(pause)* It was just a crazy idea anyway...

*Marty takes a coat from the coat tree and puts it on.
He opens the door to leave*

DEB: Where are you going?

MARTY: If I'm doing this, I'm doing it right... I'm going to buy a red plaid shirt!

Marty exits through upstage door

Lights down, End of Scene One

ACT ONE SCENE 2

Place: living-room

Time: One hour later

The living-room is empty. The front door opens and Marty cautiously enters. He's holding a large shopping bag. He tries to make it down the hall to the bedroom unseen but Deb enters from stage left.

DEB: Hi hon, back so soon?

MARTY: I've been gone an hour.

DEB: That's not much time to go shopping for a whole new woodworking wardrobe.

MARTY: To begin with there's no such thing as a "woodworking wardrobe". Men don't have "wardrobes" or "outfits", we have uniforms and equipment. And even if there was a "woodworking wardrobe" it wouldn't take me that long to buy one. Don't you have to get going?

DEB: Not for over an hour.

MARTY: Oh.

DEB: I told you, Shirley's picking me up but not till quarter to three. Alright, let me see, give me a little fashion show.

MARTY: What?

DEB: Come on, go change then come out and show me.

MARTY: Why?

DEB: So I can see what you look like in your new wardrobe, outfit, uniform... whatever.

MARTY: Why do you want to see that?

DEB: Just humor me will you? Go... go...

Deb hustles Marty down the hallway

I'll get my camera, the kids would love to see this.

MARTY: *(from down the hallway)* Do I have to?

DEB: Yes! Now where did I leave it? ...don't tell me we left it on the coast with the kids....

MARTY: *(calling from down the hall)* I'm ready.

DEB: That was fast. Wait a minute, I need a camera. I'm sure I just saw it here somewhere last week... maybe I'll use my phone... oh here it is!

She finds the camera in a drawer and puts the camera to her face to take a picture.

Ok, you can come out now.

Marty enters. The camera flashes. He is wearing a motorcycle helmet. (the type without a face guard or visor) Deb slowly lowers the camera. She stares at him for a few seconds.

What's that?

MARTY: What's what?

DEB: That thing on your head.

MARTY: It's a ... well... you know.

DEB: It better be a woodworking helmet.

MARTY: Is there such a thing?

DEB: Why are you wearing a motorcycle helmet?!

MARTY: It's a woodworking helmet.

DEB: *(picks up the pipe wrench from the end table)* Come here.

MARTY: Why?

DEB: I want to test it!

Marty removes the helmet

MARTY: I know you don't think it's a good idea but...

DEB: *(interrupting)* You've been gone for only an hour and you bought a *motorcycle!*

MARTY: No, just the helmet.

DEB: Just the helmet?

MARTY: For now.

DEB: So, you figured you'd need a helmet when you told me you were going to buy a motorcycle.

MARTY: That's not too far off.

DEB: What on earth are you thinking?

MARTY: I wasn't planning on doing this, really, but when I was on my way downtown to buy the red plaid shirt, I stopped at the light at Cathcart Road. You know, that's the light that lasts forever. Anyway, I'm sitting there waiting for the light to change and this big Harley-Davidson pulls up beside me. It sits there rumbling and I think nothing of it until I see the guy riding it.

DEB: What about him?

MARTY: I knew him, kind of. Not his name, I'd never met him before but I knew him. He looked about my age, a few miles on the old odometer, and I could tell he had a purpose.

DEB: How could you possibly know that?

MARTY: He sat tall on that Harley, he looked calm... confident. Then, he looked over at me and I saw something in his eyes.

DEB: A death wish?

MARTY: No. Confidence. A look of ... I don't know... freedom, the look of a man who has it all figured out. He must have known what I was thinking; maybe he was in my place himself at one time because he looked right at me and smiled. And you know what?

DEB: He had bugs in his teeth?

MARTY: No. He winked. He looked right into my eyes, smiled at me and winked. Right then, we connected, I could feel it... but before I could say anything the light changed, he opened up that throttle and he was gone. I just sat there, watching him ride away, the air resonating with the sound of his engine... until the guy behind me laid on the horn.

DEB: And some guy winking at you made you decide to get a motorcycle.

MARTY: Yeah, I guess it did.

DEB: Marty, why would you do this to me?

MARTY: To you? What am I doing to you?

DEB: Did it ever occur to you that I'll be the one who's worried sick every time you pull out of the driveway? Worried sick that the next time I see you I'll be identifying your body?

MARTY: Come on Deb, you're making it out to be a lot more dangerous than it is.

DEB: So a motorcycle is really not all that dangerous.

MARTY: Not if you know what you're doing.

DEB: Then why do you have to wear a helmet!

MARTY: In case you tell your wife you want a motorcycle and she decides to hit you with a pipe wrench.

DEB: No, it's so your head doesn't splatter like a pumpkin when you fall off it! Marty, you've never ridden one of those things, you've no idea what to do, you'll drive into a tree, you'll drive off a cliff, you'll ... you'll... tip over!

MARTY: There are road safety courses I can take, instruction courses. I'm not a kid any more so I won't be taking crazy risks. I'll be careful honey, I promise. Besides, we can't avoid risks... it's a risk just crossing the street, we can't be afraid of risks.

DEB: At our age we have enough risk!

MARTY: Deb, I love you but please, please let me have this one thing. Let me do this.

DEB: I'm not trying to control you; I just don't want to lose you.

MARTY: You won't lose me, I promise.

DEB: What if you tip over and fall under a cement truck?

MARTY: Honey, I'll take a course, a proper one and I won't go on the road until I'm absolutely sure I know what I'm doing. I will not tip over.

DEB: Oh Marty. I want you to be happy, you know that.

MARTY: I know honey, I know. I want the same for you.

DEB: And a motorcycle will make you happy?

MARTY: It'll give me something to do, learning how to ride it... safely! Tinkering with it, polishing it... it's a known fact guys with motorcycles spend more time polishing than actually riding.

DEB: A known fact.

MARTY: Generally known.

DEB: I just don't want somebody to have to pick you up off the road with a shovel.

MARTY: Believe me, I don't want that either which is why, I will be the safest rider ever on two wheels.

DEB: You'll buy all the protective gear that you can possibly find?

MARTY: Every last elbow pad.

DEB: You won't tip over?

MARTY: No

DEB: You'll be careful?

MARTY: Yes.

DEB: *Really* careful?

MARTY: I'll walk it across every intersection.

DEB: Don't be a wise ass. You'll stay under the speed limit?

MARTY: Yes. *(pause)* Oh honey, can't you just see it, a clear blue sky, the sun is shining and it's just me alone with the open road!

DEB: Just you alone.

MARTY: Yes... and the open road!

DEB: *(pause)* Oh.

MARTY: I'll be safe, I promise.

DEB: Fine. Buy your motorcycle. But, I'm telling you right now, if you kill yourself on it, I'm going to have them defibrillate you back to life so I can kill you myself.

MARTY: Deal! Thank you!

Marty hugs Deb and gives her a quick kiss then starts to leave.

DEB: Whoa, Whoa! Wait just a minute!

MARTY: You can't change your mind so soon, it's not allowed.

DEB: You're going out to buy a motorcycle right now?

MARTY: Sure, why not?

DEB: Because the Baxters are coming over tonight and besides, do you even know what kind you want?

MARTY: I don't know, but I saw a nice one with an engine shaped like this *(he makes a vee shape with his hands or arms)*. The salesman said it's a "vee twin".

DEB: Do you even know what that means?

MARTY: Sure, it's a vee and there are two of them.

DEB: Do your research Marty, don't go off all half cocked, that's not like you. If you run out and buy something now, you'll probably regret it, figure out what you want first. Maybe a scooter.

MARTY: I'm not riding a scooter, even the name sounds pathetic. It "scoots". Nope. It's a motorcycle I want. Two wheels of heavy metal thunder.

DEB: Oh my God. Listen, Marty, don't make a rash decision, figure out what you really want first. Take some time, think about it.

MARTY: I have been thinking about it.

DEB: Just do this one thing for me please? Take some time. I think you need to feel that you have something to do, something to keep you occupied, right?

MARTY: You just want the time to talk me out of it.

DEB: Maybe I need the time to talk myself into it, have you thought of that? Please, can you stick with this woodworking course for a while and see how that feels before you decide to actually buy a motorcycle, can you do that?

MARTY: I want you to feel good about this too.

DEB: Then that would help.

MARTY: *(pause)* Ok hon, I'll wait. I'll sign up for the woodworking course and see how that works for me. But I'll tell you something, even thinking about buying one is making a difference in me.

DEB: What kind of a difference?

MARTY: I don't know, I feel alive, the air smells sweeter, the sun looks brighter.

DEB: I feel the same when I buy shoes only they're a lot safer.

MARTY: This is different. I feel ... manly!

DEB: You don't need a motorcycle to be manly.

MARTY: But don't you see? For the first time in my life I feel like I could be that guy on the motorcycle... the guy they write all the songs about.

DEB: What songs?

MARTY: You know, "Born to be Wild"... and all the rest. The guy, who for one sweet moment in time, doesn't give a damn about the rules.

DEB: Except traffic rules.

MARTY: Well, yes ... those I would give a damn about. But the rest of them... society's rules... the rules that have governed my entire life can eat my dust! I don't know how else to describe it. It's like a primal force has been awakened inside me...

DEB: Oh for crying out loud....

MARTY: I'm a warrior, I'm on the prowl! I can feel the blood coursing through my veins. It's coursing Deb, it's coursing all through me.

DEB: Coursing?

MARTY: Coursing! Surging! The thought of a motorcycle has taken thirty years off me! I was born to be wild and I didn't even know it. *(he takes her hand and puts it on his chest)* Feel my heart. It's not beating... it's *throbbing!*

DEB: Do you need to sit down?

MARTY: Throbbing!

DEB: Should I call a doctor?

MARTY: No, no doctor. *(he puts on the motorcycle helmet)* You're the only prescription I need!

He dips Deb, giving her a passionate smooch

Lights down, End of Scene Two

ACT ONE SCENE 3

Time: Same day around 6pm

Place Living-room

Deb is in the living-room. She has just arrived home and is hanging up her coat.

DEB: *(calling down the hall)* Marty? Are you awake? Marty, what are you doing? The Baxters will be here in a couple of hours.

Marty enters dressed casually, doing up his shirt and moving in such a way as to test his back to see if it's sore.

MARTY: I know, I know, I'll be ready. Where were you?

DEB: I told you, the Library Ladies. *And* you made me late for the meeting! I didn't hear Shirley at the door so I had to drive myself.

MARTY: I didn't even know you left.

DEB: You feel asleep. Big surprise.

MARTY: You wore me out... but my back is feeling better now.

DEB: I told you not to try that move; you're so flexible any more. Oh my god, it was the middle of the afternoon! I told you to close the window, what are the neighbours going to think?

MARTY: They'll be jealous that we're still making sweet daytime monkey love.

DEB: Always the romantic. So, that rub worked on your back?

MARTY: Yeah, what is that stuff, it stunk up the whole place. It smells like an old person's bedroom in there.

DEB: It is an old person's bedroom.

MARTY: I mean a *really* old persons bedroom. It smells like my grandmothers room and she'd be a hundred and twenty by now.

Marty takes a coat off the coat tree.

DEB: What are you doing?

MARTY: Well, if it's back to woodworking. I'll be needing that red plaid shirt, then I'll swing by the high school and sign up for the classes.

DEB: You're doing that now?

MARTY: Might as well.

DEB: But Fred and Gladys will be here at eight.

MARTY: Honey, it's me we're talking about here. I'm a man going out to buy a shirt which should take around ten minutes leaving me plenty of time to drop by the school and be back in time for the Baxters.

DEB: Why don't you sign me up too.

MARTY: What?

DEB: Sign me up too, we could do it together.

MARTY: But, you think it's dangerous.

DEB: Dangerous for you, not dangerous for me.

MARTY: I don't know, it's kind of a guy thing.

DEB: Don't be such a Neanderthal.

MARTY: But, you have your things and now, this will be my thing.

DEB: But, it's not even your thing yet so I thought maybe your thing could be our thing.

MARTY: Why can't I have my own thing?

DEB: No reason, I just thought it might be nice, that's all.

MARTY: It's not that I don't want to do things with you it's just that... well... you know.

DEB: Sure, I get it.

MARTY: You're OK with that?

DEB: Yeah, sure. (*changing the subject*) So... when you go out, stop by Olsens Bakery and pick up half a dozen of those little cream tarts for dessert.

MARTY: I'm not sure if Fred can eat pastry this week. I called a few minutes ago for his culinary no fly list but he said to call back later, he'll know better by seven. If he won't eat them, more butter tarts for us.

DEB: *Cream* tarts.

MARTY: Same thing.

DEB: No they're not. Want me to write it down?

MARTY: Of course not, I can handle a few tarts.

Marty exits

DEB: That's what *he* said.

Lights down, End of Scene Three

ACT ONE SCENE 4

PLACE: Living Room

TIME: Shortly after eight pm

Lights Up. The coffee table is back in place. One of the downstage legs has been very obviously and poorly repaired with duct tape. There is a bakery box on the coffee table. Deb enters from the kitchen stage left.

DEB: *(calling to Marty who is offstage in the bedroom)* Marty, what's taking you so long? Fred and Gladys should have been here fifteen minutes ago.

MARTY: *(from offstage)* Gimme a second.

DEB: Well hurry up because that's all you have. And where did you put the... *(she sees the bakery box)* Oh, never mind, found it.

She picks up the opens it.

(to herself with resigned frustration) Butter tarts. *(calling down the hall)*

You had one job Marty!

She takes the box back to the kitchen.

MARTY: What?

There is a knock on the door.

DEB: *(calling from the kitchen)* What did I tell you, they're here.

MARTY: *(calling from down the hallway)* Tell them to wait.

DEB: I'm not telling them that!

MARTY: I can't get the door, I'm not ready yet.

Another knock on the door

DEB: Oh for crying out loud! *(even louder)* Come in, it's open!

Fred and Gladys enter. They are about the same age as Deb and Marty.

FRED: You're lucky it's us, we could have stolen your TV.

GLADYS: Fred, don't be such a master of disaster.

Deb enters from the kitchen wiping her hands, it's obvious she's been cooking something.

DEB: You want our TV, you're welcome to it, there's never anything on anyway. *(she hugs Gladys)* Hi hon...

GLADYS: Hi, sorry we're late but we had to go back, Fred forgot his hand sanitizer.

FRED: I didn't forget it, I had to refill it.

GLADYS: Oooh, do I smell sausage rolls?

DEB: Maybe. They've been in the freezer so long, I've forgotten what they are.

FRED: So those are actually sausage rolls I smell?

DEB: More than likely.

FRED: Good, I thought I was having a stroke.

DEB: You're fine Freddie, nice to see you.

Deb goes to greet Fred with a hug but he backs away.

FRED: Nope, better not. I sneezed three times on the way over here; I may be coming down with something. *(offers his wrist to Deb)* Here, check my pulse, does that feel fast to you?

DEB: *(taking his wrist)* Feels OK to me.

FRED: Last night it was skipping every third beat, every third beat! I don't know what's going on. Where's Marty?

DEB: He's in the bedroom; he says he's not ready yet.

FRED: What, is he naked? If he's wearing pants, he's ready.

GLADYS: Don't make him come out if he's not ready.

FRED: *(feeling his own wrist)* That's definitely too fast. *(calls out)* Marty!

GLADYS: *(to Deb)* Last night he said he had no pulse at all for twenty minutes.

FRED: One big pump, then nothing for the entire last half of the Antiques Roadshow, I was clinically dead. *(calls down the hall)* Marty, stop primping it's a waste of time!

GLADYS: Well at least now that he's retired he still makes an effort. Unlike some people I know.

FRED: I refuse to shave every day, it's bad for the skin.

DEB: *(calling down the hall)* Marty, will you get out here?

MARTY: *(from down the hall)* I'm coming, I'm coming!

Marty enters. He's wearing a red plaid flannel shirt, a leather carpenter's apron and work gloves. He is holding a hand saw. He proudly presents himself.

MARTY: Well, what do you think?

FRED: It's a saw.

MARTY: I know it's a saw, I'm not a complete idiot.

GLADYS: Why are you holding a saw?

MARTY: It's not just the saw, it's the whole package. Take in the whole package. What do you say?

FRED: Trick or treat?

GLADYS: Are you going to grow a beard?

DEB: You're not are you?

MARTY: No!

FRED: What's the deal?

DEB: It's Marty's new direction.

GLADYS: Where's he going?

DEB: Insane.

MARTY: It's a new beginning for me Fred, a new beginning.

FRED: Well, you're beginning to look ridiculous; I suppose that's a start.

MARTY: I'm expanding my horizons. I'm taking up woodworking.

FRED: Woodworking? You'll saw your hand off.

MARTY: That's what Deb said.

FRED: Smart woman.

MARTY: I won't saw anything off. I've signed up down at the high school woodworking shop. Lots of retired guys go there, I never knew! Twice a week Fred, keep the mind and body active. What do you say, why don't you sign up too?

FRED: I'll saw *my* hand off. And maybe yours too.

MARTY: Come on, what's the highlight of your week besides hanging out at the coffee shop flaunting your surgical scars.

FRED: I don't flaunt.

MARTY: What do you have to lose?

FRED: My left hand.

GLADYS: Think of the great scar you'll have.

MARTY: Here, hold this. (*he hands the saw to Fred*). There, how does that feel?

GLADYS: He looks good. You look good honey, you look very manly.

MARTY: See!

FRED: You plan to take up woodworking wearing that get up?

MARTY: Of course.

FRED: Shows how much you know, what about safety goggles?

MARTY: The guy at the hardware store didn't mention goggles..

FRED: Are you kidding? One errant chip of wood and you're the neighborhood pirate. If you're serious about doing this, you can have mine. I bought a pair when I played ping pong with the Robertsons.

DEB: You wear ping pong goggles?

FRED: I happen to have unusually large eye sockets and a flying ping pong ball could lodge right in there. But that's nothing compared to what this thing could do. *(he brandishes the saw)* I could cut my head off with this!

GLADYS: But why would you?

FRED: It's a worst case scenario. You really think this makes me look manly?

GLADYS: As long as you don't try to use it.

FRED: You see? I'm useless at his sort of stuff and you are too, so you're just setting us up for failure. Besides, we have a guy who takes care of all the handyman jobs.

GLADYS: And he's very manly.

FRED: You think our guy is manly?

DEB: *(to Gladys)* Our guy is manly too.

MARTY: Well we're not going to need our thirty dollar an hour "manly guy" much longer.

FRED: *(to Gladys)* What's so manly about our guy?

GLADYS: What can I tell you?

FRED: How long have you thought he was manly?

GLADYS: Now dear, watch your blood pressure.

FRED: *(puts his hand to the side of his neck)* It does feel high.

GLADYS: Check your scar, you know it changes colour if you get too upset.

Fred pulls his shirt out of his pants

MARTY: No! Deb, do something!

Fred puts his hand on his surgical scar (lower abdomen)

FRED: I think I can feel my pulse in it.

Fred, with one hand on his surgical scar places one hand on the side of his neck

FRED: The pulses don't match. What does that mean?

GLADYS: Sit down, I'll get you something.

Fred sits on the couch, Gladys exits to the kitchen

FRED: *(to Marty)* I was clinically dead last night, do you know that? I was going to call you but I wanted to leave the line open in case I needed to call nine one one.

MARTY: Well next time you die, be sure to let me know.

Gladys returns with a glass of water

FRED: My pulses still don't match.

GLADYS: *(hands Fred the glass of water)* Here, this will help.

FRED: It's only water.

GLADYS: Just drink it honey.

FRED: *(holds out his glass)* Marty, throw a little Scotch in here, will you?

MARTY: Anything for your pulses.

Marty takes the glass, goes to the drink cabinet and makes two drinks

MARTY: Anybody else?

DEB: I'm going to have a beer. Gladys?

GLADYS: Oh, why not.

Deb exits to the kitchen and returns with two beers.

MARTY: *(hands Fred a drink)* Listen Fred, about what I mentioned a minute ago.

FRED: You mean the woodworking classes?

MARTY: I looked into it, they even have classes for beginners like us.

FRED: Nah, it's just not my thing, it would only...

MARTY: *(interrupting)* There's a reason why your pulses don't match.

FRED: There is?

MARTY: Absolutely. It's your Feng Shui. Your physical Feng Shuis *(shways)* are all out of whack. *(to Deb)* It's a thing, isn't it hon.

DEB: If you say so.

MARTY: Because you have neglected the practical, hands on part of your life, your body's energy planes are out of sync and your internal organs aren't harmonizing with each other.

FRED: You know, I haven't been feeling right lately.

DEB: Maybe I'll have that Scotch after all.

Deb makes another Scotch on the rocks.

MARTY: The human body is a complicated mechanism, ignore one facet and the whole biological balance is thrown off. That would explain why you've been feeling a little foggy lately.

FRED: Have I been feeling foggy?

MARTY: Fred, if you have to ask.

FRED: See Gladys, I told you something else was wrong with me!

GLADYS: *(to Deb)* Scotch here too.

MARTY: I don't think you have to worry Fred, this is easily fixed, you just have to bring back the balance nature intended. We've both lived very intellectual lives, me in the world of academia and you as a bean counter.

FRED: Chartered Accountant!

MARTY: That's what I said. Anyway, my point is, as stimulating as that was mentally; we have both failed to develop crucial facets of our manliness.

GLADYS: Bring the bottle Deb.

DEB: *(already going to the drinks cabinet)* Way ahead of you.

MARTY: What do think Fred?

FRED: You're talking nonsense.

MARTY: Really? Feel these hands.

Marty takes Fred's hand and rubs his palm on Fred's.

See? Smooth as a baby's bottom.

FRED: How would I know, we never had kids.

MARTY: They're soft Fred and so are yours. Soft from a lifetime of avoiding honest labour. It's time to toughen up these hands and express our virility! Remember... your pulses don't match, do they?

FRED: That *is* a little worrisome...

MARTY: Whaddya say?

FRED: (*longish pause*) You're so full of crap!

MARTY: Come on Fred, live a little, try something new.

FRED: I don't need anything new. I've got my routine, I know what I'm doing and more importantly, I know *why* I'm doing it. I don't need to go waving sharp tools at pieces of wood trying to build something that nobody needs.

GLADYS: How often do these classes run?

MARTY: What?

GLADYS: I said, how often do these classes run.

MARTY: Twice a week.

GLADYS: Every week?

MARTY: Seven til nine Tuesdays and Thursdays.

GLADYS: Fred, you're going.

FRED: What?

GLADYS: You're going.

FRED: I don't want to go.

GLADYS: You do the same thing every night and it's time you broadened your horizons a little, Marty is right.

FRED: My horizons are just fine, my evenings are full already.

GLADYS: Full with watching television while Googling symptoms on your laptop.

FRED: There's nothing wrong with being aware of the state of one's own health, especially at my time of life.

GLADYS: Last week you watched a gardening show about growing tomatoes and spent the next two hours convinced you had Blossom End Rot.

FRED: If you hadn't forced me go bicycle riding for the first time in ten years that never would've occurred to me. Besides, I'm not the only one getting ideas from TV, you spend half your time watching travel shows.

GLADYS: It's the only way I'm ever going to see Venice!

FRED: If you want to travel half way around the world and come down with all sorts of foreign infections, which I probably have no immunity from, be my guest. I'm staying put.

GLADYS: You're being ridiculous.

FRED: You think so? One sneeze from a Gondolier and I'm stuck in a foreign hospital with an oxygen tube up my nose and a nurse I can't understand.

GLADYS: Deb, you talk to him.

DEB: Tell him to take you to Venice?

GLADYS: No, that's a lost cause, just say the same thing you said to Marty that got him out of the house.

DEB: Ok... Fred, if you don't take the classes, I'll drag you behind my car so you know what it feels like to fall off a motorcycle.

GLADYS: What?

DEB: You asked.

Gladys sits down beside Fred and takes his hand.

GLADYS: Fred, listen to me. I love you dearly but you're driving me crazy. It's been almost a year, and since you retired you're home all day and all evening. All day and all evening, do you understand what that means? You're home *all the time!*

FRED: But, that's good isn't it?

GLADYS: No. I married you for better or worse, richer or poorer ... I said nothing about "24-7".

FRED: I'm beginning to feel wheezy. How long does it take for a lung to collapse?

GLADYS: Haven't you noticed that you never thought you were sick before you retired?

FRED: I was too busy to be sick.

GLADYS: No, you were too busy to *think* about being sick.

FRED: Maybe I just never noticed how sick I was. Thank goodness I retired or I might have died from not knowing I was sick.

GLADYS: Let me put it this way. If you don't find something to occupy yourself, I will.

FRED: What do you mean?

GLADYS: I'll make up a "Honey Do" list, the likes of which the world has never seen.

FRED: You wouldn't.

GLADYS: Try me.

FRED: *(pause) (to Marty)* Woodworking you say?

Lights down, End of Scene Four

ACT ONE SCENE 5

Place: A coffee shop

Time: The next morning

The coffee shop can be represented by a bistro table and two chairs down right in a pool of light. Fred and Marty are sitting at the table with paper coffee cups.

FRED: One word Marty, one word! Last night all you had to say was one word and everything would have been fine.

MARTY: And what word is that?

FRED: No.

MARTY: No?

FRED: That's right. "No, I don't think woodworking is Fred's thing, I'd rather go by myself"

MARTY: But I'd already said I wanted you to go.

FRED: You could've changed your mind! You could have realized that I'm the kind of guy who would definitely saw body parts off and decide you didn't want that on your conscience.

MARTY: I'm the one who's likely to saw body parts off, you're the one who's likely to pass out from wood fumes.

FRED: Same thing.

MARTY: Not really.

FRED: Is there aspartame in this coffee? I think my face is going numb.

MARTY: Just sugar, I put it in myself.

FRED: That was close. But why woodworking?

MARTY: Why not?

FRED: Splinters!

MARTY: You're your own man Fred, you don't have to do it if you don't want to.

FRED: I don't want to.

MARTY: Then don't do it.

FRED: I have to.

MARTY: I think you're right.

FRED: If Gladys starts a Honey Do list, there'll be no end to it! Gutters cleaned, windows washed, stuff painted. I thought that's what we had a guy for.

MARTY: You do have a guy for it, as long as you take the course with me.

FRED: The stress is building already. My arteries are tightening up, I can feel it.

MARTY: How would your arteries feel at the top of a twelve foot ladder cleaning out the eavestroughs?

FRED: She's got me between a rock and a hard place Marty, what do I do?

MARTY: Give up. There's one of you and one of her... you're outnumbered.

FRED: I'll be doing it under duress, protest and whatever else I can think of.

MARTY: To tell you the truth, it wasn't my first choice either.

FRED: What!?

MARTY: I don't mind the idea, but it's really just to distract Deb from what I really want.

FRED: And what's that?

MARTY: A motorcycle!

FRED: You're going to buy a motorcycle?

MARTY: Eventually.

FRED: And Deb's going to let you?

MARTY: The deal is, I take the woodworking course before I buy it. She thinks it'll distract me and I won't want one anymore, but really I'm just biding my time.

FRED: You can get away with that?

MARTY: I'm working the long game.

FRED: Wow. Can I drive it too?

MARTY: No, but after I get my license, I'll give you rides.

FRED: So I'd have to squeeze up behind you and put my arms around you?

MARTY: *(pause)* Maybe you'd better buy one of your own.

FRED: Gladys would kill me if I even thought about buying a motorcycle. In fact she probably knows I'm thinking about one now. She can sense things like that, it's scary. So when are you getting it?

MARTY: It's just a matter of time my friend, I even have one picked out.

FRED: A motorcycle? That is so brilliant!

Lights down on coffee shop, lights up on Gladys and Deb in the living room. They are having a glass of wine. The switch should be very quick so Gladys's line comes right on the heels of Fred's last line.

GLADYS: A motorcycle? That is so stupid!

DEB: You're telling me!

GLADYS: At his age, is he insane?

DEB: That's what I said too... except for the "at his age" part, he can be kinda sensitive about that.

GLADYS: Well, I hope you knocked that idea out of his head.

DEB: I was going to but he was wearing a helmet. What I *am* doing is subtly guiding him in a different direction. He's going to delay buying it until he finishes the woodworking course.

GLADYS: Just delay? What happens when he actually buys it?

DEB: He *thinks* he wants a motorcycle but what he really wants is something he can get involved with again and a motorcycle just seemed the obvious choice. Once he gets wrapped up in woodworking, he'll forget all about it. Woodworking will eventually fill the void left when he retired. I'm working the long game.

GLADYS: You're sure this will work?

DEB: Yep. Wanting a motorcycle was just a symptom of what ailed him.

GLADYS: Wish I could figure out what ails Fred.

DEB: Just about everything from what I can tell.

GLADYS: If only he just wanted a motorcycle. At least then he wouldn't be afraid of encountering "foreign germs" and we could enjoy ourselves a bit. Venice was always our dream for after we retired, but now...

DEB: What is it with men? Marty retires and wants to ride off on a Harley, Fred retires and becomes a human petri dish. Why can't they just... I don't know... read a book! .

GLADYS: They say a lot of marriages break up after retirement. I read that some people can't stand the thought of having to spend all day every day with the person they've been avoiding through work for the last thirty years.

DEB: Where did you read that?

GLADYS: Cosmo. I bought it for the article "Fifty Red Hot Secrets for Mind Blowing Sex" .

DEB: Fifty?

GLADYS: I know, who knew there were that many. But most of them are just common sense.

Deb stares quizzically at Gladys.

What?

DEB: Nothing, I'm just impressed, that's all. *(pause)* Are you and Fred ok? I mean, you're not one of those who...

GLADYS: No, no, we're fine, I *want* to spend time with him. Maybe not every last second. He follows me around like a puppy dog, there has to be a happy medium.

DEB: Marty's seems a little confused. Apparently he's "lost" and thinks a motorcycle will take him to wherever he is. *(pause)* What if he goes there without me?

GLADYS: What's going on?

DEB: Nothing really. Everything seems fine, but I can't help worrying. You hear so much about ... well you read about it in Cosmo. Marty's been feeling lost since he retired, wants to be "alone on the open road" and now, he doesn't want me to take the woodworking course with him.

GLADYS: You asked him and he said no?

Deb nods

GLADYS: Don't read too much into that, guys can be possessive about hobbies.

DEB: Maybe you're right. I guess I just want to stay connected to him.

GLADYS: But woodworking? Why would you want to do that?

DEB: Why not? It might be fun to saw some lumber, hammer some nails, make a mess.

GLADYS: You'll saw your hand off.

Lights down , End of Scene Five

ACT ONE SCENE 6

Place: A woodworking classroom

Time: The next evening

Fred and Marty are in the woodworking classroom. (Two Black and Decker Workmates or something similar in a pool of light). They are both sanding pieces of wood secured in the Workmates. Both are wearing red plaid flannel shirts. Fred is wearing safety goggles and a hard hat with hearing protection attached.

MARTY: Fred, hand me that thing over there.

Fred doesn't answer.

MARTY: *(louder)* Fred!

FRED: What?

MARTY: Take those things off, how much noise can you make sanding?

Fred removes the hard hat.

FRED: It's everybody else in here sanding too, it all adds up. I wish I had a dust mask, My sinuses are closing up. I should have brought my Neti Pot.

MARTY: Don't you dare bring that thing, you start with the "nasal irrigation" and you'll get us both kicked out.

FRED: It's a scientific fact that the sinuses are full of all sorts of...

MARTY: Don't start! Just pass me that thing that's you know, slopy on one side and flat on the other.

FRED: You mean the chisel.

MARTY: Right.

Fred hands Marty a chisel

FRED: How could you possibly not know that's called a chisel?

Marty stands with the chisel in his hand, staring at the piece of wood in the WorkMate. Fred stares at Marty.

Do you need a manual?

MARTY: No.

FRED: I thought you wanted to chisel something.

MARTY: So did I, but I doubt if it's going to help. This is about as close to a salad bowl as I'm going to get.

Marty takes his piece of wood out of the workmate and holds it up. It is roughly bowl shaped. Very roughly. The closest it comes to looking like a bowl is a slight indentation.

FRED: Well, as a salad bowl, it makes a good piece of firewood.

MARTY: Let's see yours.

Fred removes his salad bowl and holds it up. There is a large hole in the bottom.

FRED: I think I sanded it too much.

MARTY: Congratulations, you've made a wooden donut. Why did we have to make bowls anyway?

FRED: No wonder we messed it up, our hearts weren't in it.

MARTY: Do they have to be?

FRED: Of course they do. We have to come up with our own project, something we want to make, not something we're told to make.

MARTY: Fine, you think of something. In the meantime, *(holding up his bowl)* What am I supposed to do with this?

FRED: Never mind that, feel my pulse. I think it's elevated.

MARTY: So what?

FRED: It could be a symptom.

MARTY: Of what?

FRED: I don't know, it could be anything... varnishing poisoning.

MARTY: Why don't you just pass out and get it over with.

FRED: *(holding up his bowl)* Is this an exotic wood?

MARTY: I don't know, it came from that rack over there. *(looks at his bowl)* How am I supposed to tell Deb I made this thing.

Fred starts to sniffle and scratch

FRED: I don't feel right. Is it Australian Cypress?

MARTY: What?

FRED: I Googled it. If this is Australian Cyprus I could be having some very nasty reactions. Look at my eyelids. Do they look swollen to you?

MARTY: You're fine Fred, besides I don't care what kind of wood this is.

FRED: Well I do, because my antihistamine is wearing off and I need to know what to expect.

MARTY: I don't know... poplar, maybe it's poplar.

FRED: In that case, blisters, coughing and asthma.

MARTY: Oh come on, that's just the first wood I thought of... wait a minute, you *memorized* all those?

FRED: *(he coughs)* My chest feels tight...

MARTY: You were fine a minute ago.

FRED: That was a minute ago, right now I need to lie down.

Fred lies down on his back.

MARTY: Will you get up, everyone is looking! *(to the unseen classmates)* It's ok.. he's ok. Fred, come on, get up.

FRED: My circulation isn't right. If I get up, I'll fall right back down again and probably concuss myself, go into convulsions and swallow my tongue.

MARTY: At least it would shut you up.

FRED: Is that what you want?

MARTY: I want you to stop making a spectacle of yourself, that's what I want.

Fred comes to a sitting position

FRED: I'm having a potential medical emergency here and all you're worried about is "a spectacle"! I could be lying here on the floor dead, how would you feel then?

MARTY: Suspicious.

FRED: You want my exotic wood allergy to choke the life out of me? You want me to die right here? Fine! How's this!

Fred crosses his hands over his chest and lies back on the floor.

(louder, to the whole class) Don't anyone bother calling for help, if my best friend doesn't care, why should you?

MARTY: *(to the unseen classmates)* He's fine, he's fine, don't worry, nothing to see here. Believe me, nothing to see here. Fred, will you please get up!

FRED: Wait a minute.

MARTY: No!

FRED: *(a eureka moment)* I've got it!

MARTY: What now, typhoid?

Fred comes to a sitting position

FRED: Why would you think I have typhoid?

MARTY: I don't.

FRED: Good. I know what we're going to build!

Lights down End of Scene Six

ACT ONE SCENE 7

Place: the living room

Time: 9:30 that evening, after the class

Lights up in Marty and Deb's living room. Deb is tidying up. We hear a car pull into the driveway and

a car door close. Marty enters. He's carrying a plastic bag containing the bowl he made.

MARTY: Nine thirty and the Riverside expressway is still jammed! What's going on in this city? Fred was hyperventilating all the way home.

DEB: You should've gotten off at State and taken Belmont.

MARTY: But there's construction on Belmont, down to one lane all the way to First Avenue.

DEB: That's why nobody takes it anymore, so now it's faster than the expressway.

MARTY: So Belmont's under construction which makes so slow that nobody takes it anymore, which in fact, makes it faster.

DEB: That's right.

MARTY: So when people realize this, it'll jam up again and be slower than the expressway.

DEB: That's when we stay on the expressway to Hyland Drive and take Hyland to Belmont because all the Belmont traffic will get off before Hyland to try to get back on the expressway which they think will be faster.

MARTY: You make it sound so simple.

DEB: It is if you approach it logically. How was your class? I see you didn't saw your hand off so that's a good start. What's in the bag?

MARTY: My first woodworking project.

DEB: That's a pretty small coffee table.

MARTY: Fred and I had to make the same thing. It's their starter project.

He takes the salad bowl out of the plastic bag and shows it to Deb.

DEB: Very good. You took a shapeless piece of wood and turned it into a differently shaped shapeless piece of wood.

MARTY: Apparently my heart wasn't in it.

DEB: What is it?

MARTY: A salad bowl

DEB: Where do you put the salad?

MARTY: Here, in this little depressed area.

DEB: You're right, that is a depressed area. You've made the world's first salad bowl that needs counseling.

MARTY: Fred's is a wooden donut, imagine how confused *his* salad bowl is.

DEB: He survived the class?

MARTY: He seemed ok when I dropped him off. *(he holds up the salad bowl)* What do you think, should we put this on display somewhere?

DEB: Absolutely *(she takes the bowl)* I'll take care of that.

The phone rings and Marty answers.

Hello. *(pause) (to Deb)* Are you expecting an obscene phone call?

DEB: Not today. Why?

MARTY: *(listens on the phone)* Nothing but heavy breathing.

DEB: Give it here *(she takes the phone and listens)* It's Fred.

MARTY: You recognize Fred's heavy breathing?

DEB: I can hear Gladys in the background telling him to get off the phone.

MARTY: Oh for cryin' out loud.

He takes the phone back.

Fred, are you ok? Wheeze once for yes and twice for no. *(pause)* That's three times Fred, what does that mean? *(pause)* I can't understand a word you're wheezing. Fred, we have to come up with some kind of a codeoh never mind, put Gladys on.

DEB: What does he want?

MARTY: Oxygen? How should I know. *(in the phone)* Gladys? What's wrong with Fred? *(pause) (to Deb)* He wants to come here.

DEB: Why?

MARTY: *(into the phone)* Why? *(pause)* *(to Deb)* Because if he has to call an ambulance we're closer to the hospital.

DEB: And there's a cemetery just down the street, what a bonus.

MARTY: I'll drive him there myself. *(into the phone)* He has what!? ...Then tell him it wasn't poplar, tell him they used special hypoallergenic wood for legal reasons. *(pause)* Of course I'm making it up but he doesn't know that.

DEB: Well, your first year psych course has finally paid off.

MARTY: And tell him it's GMO free and dolphin friendly. *(pause)* Oh, he can breathe now? Big surprise.

DEB: Is he OK ?

MARTY: I think he's going to live. *(to Gladys on the phone)* What? *(pause)* Tell him yes, absolutely. *(to Deb)* He says he won't go back unless I'm sure the wood is hypoallergenic. *(to Gladys)* He's OK now? Good, tell him I'll pick him up at six on Thursday for the next class.

Marty hangs up the phone.

DEB: How did Fred like the class, apart from it nearly asphyxiating him.

MARTY: He wasn't too keen to begin with, but I think he's coming around.

DEB: Really?

MARTY: Well, we've moved past the salad bowls and now we're on to our next project and he's strangely enthused about it.

DEB: What is it?

MARTY: It was Fred's idea.

DEB: Well, what is it?

MARTY: We're moving into the area of ultimate practicality.

DEB: And what does that mean?

MARTY: That'll have to wait, we've decided it's best if this project exists under a cloak of secrecy.

DEB: Now you're starting to worry me.

MARTY: What's to worry about?

DEB: I don't know but you and Fred will come up with something.

MARTY: Would you rather I go buy my motorcycle now?

DEB: You haven't even given woodworking a chance yet, we agreed that...

MARTY: Exactly! I'll give it a fair chance but nobody said I had to keep you informed every step of the way. Fred and I will unveil the project when the time is right.

DEB: You two are up to something. I'll ask Gladys.

MARTY: Won't work, we want it to be a surprise.

DEB: Fine, go wear your cloak of invisibility.

MARTY: Secrecy!

DEB: Whatever. *(hands him the salad bowl)* Here, go fill this with a lettuce leaf.

Lights down, End of Scene Seven

ACT ONE SCENE 8

Place: Woodworking classroom

Time: One week later

Marty and Fred are back in the woodworking class. They are working on a couple of long planks placed across the Workmates. They are both wearing red plaid flannel shirts. Fred is wearing a hard hat, ear protection, safety goggles and a dust mask. Fred says something to Marty, but it's unintelligible due to the mask

MARTY: What?

More unintelligible mumbling from Fred

Will you take off that stupid mask, I can't understand a word you're saying. And those stupid earmuffs.

Fred takes off the mask and hard hat and also removes a mouth guard.

FRED: I said...

MARTY: *(interrupting)* What's that thing?

FRED: It's a mouth guard, what does it look like?

MARTY: It looked like you took your dentures out.

FRED: A chunk of wood could go flying anywhere. And I don't wear dentures.

MARTY: Fine!

FRED: A couple of implants and three crowns, that's it.

MARTY: So you floss, wonderful. What did you want?

FRED: What did I want?

MARTY: You wanted something.

FRED: I did?

MARTY: Apparently not.

FRED: Oh yeah... are you sure this wood is hypoallergenic?

MARTY: Can you breathe?

FRED: *(inhales deeply)* Yes.

MARTY: Anything itching?

FRED: *(pause)* No.

MARTY: Anything swollen?

FRED: No

MARTY: Then it's hypoallergenic.

FRED: You know, I'm actually enjoying this. Now we have our own project, I've been reading up a lot about woodworking and I'm kind of excited about it.

MARTY: This is a weird thing to be excited about. I can't believe I let you talk me into it. What was wrong with a coffee table?

FRED: Everything is wrong with a coffee table, but this makes sense, this is something everybody needs.

MARTY: Everybody needs a coffee table.

FRED: No they don't, but this... this is universal!

MARTY: The rest of the class thinks we're strange. Have you noticed nobody talks to us?

FRED: They can think what they want. Here, sand this edge, it's kinda rough.

MARTY: Why do I have to sand the edge, I'm always sanding.

FRED: Because sawdust could lodge in my bronchial tubes, I happen to have unusually small bronchial tubes.

MARTY: Who measures their bronchial tubes?

FRED: Forget it, it's good enough, it's an inside edge, it'll be covered by the joint. All we have to do now is screw it together.

MARTY: Wouldn't nails be faster?

FRED: No, this has to last a long time. Think about it, do you want it falling apart? It needs to be fastened with screws.

MARTY: It'll take forever, nails are faster.

FRED: No, we'll use an impact driver.

MARTY: A what?

FRED: It's like a cordless drill but it's specifically designed to drive screws. It's a hundred times faster than doing it by hand. I saw one on the internet.

MARTY: I'll screw my hand to something.

FRED: I know, that's why I can handle the complicated parts and you can hand me the wood.

MARTY: How do you know all this?

FRED: I didn't until I decided to learn.

MARTY: You seem to be suddenly omniscient, how do you suggest I explain this thing to Deb?

FRED: You'll think of something, you're good with words. Once you tell Deb, she'll talk to Gladys and it'll be easier for me to convince her it's a good idea.

MARTY: Why don't you tell Gladys first?

FRED: That wouldn't make any sense, we haven't built mine yet.

MARTY: Why do I ever listen to you.

FRED: Look, we'll screw this together, put a finishing coat on it, then after next class we can take it back to your place. I'll help you explain to Deb.

MARTY: I can see my whole life flashing before my eyes.

FRED: Well then, our timing is perfect, isn't it? I can hardly wait to see the look on Debs face.

FRED: You and me both.

Lights down, End of Scene Eight

END OF ACT ONE