

La Petite Fleur

A Play in One Act

Written by

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Cast of Characters

- Barbara: Woman in her early fifties who thinks she is dying from acute leukemia. She was Ian's girlfriend years ago.
- Ian: Mid-fifties and the old boyfriend of Barbara.
- Nurse: A nurse on the floor where Barbara is a patient.
- Setting: A hospital room. Evening.
- At Rise: The lights come up and Barbara is in bed asleep. Ian enters carrying a bouquet of flowers. He seems nervous. He stands at Barbara's bed staring at her. He turns and quickly exits. A moment goes by and he returns and paces quietly in front of Barbara's bed, as if rehearsing what he wants to say. The nurse enters carrying a thermometer and a tablet. She stares at Ian for a moment.

NURSE

Hello.

IAN

(nervously)

Oh, hello. (pause) Goodbye.

(They stare at each other for a beat and then Ian exits. The nurse crosses to Barbara.)

NURSE

Come on Barbara, wake up. Time to take your temperature.
(Barbara looks up and turns her back on the nurse.)

Barbara, I know how hard this is on you, but please, a little cooperation would be helpful.

(Barbara sits up.)

BARBARA

This is my second day here and you have taken my temperature about 5000 times. Don't you think you have enough data by now?

NURSE

Miss Tepinski.

BARBARA

(mocking)

Miss Tepinski. (pause) Oh, alright. God.

NURSE

When I walked in, there was a man here to see you.

(The nurse puts the thermometer in Barbara's ear for a few beats and then takes it out. She takes Barbara's hand and begins to take her pulse)

BARBARA

What? A guy was in here?

NURSE

Yeah, with flowers. He was pacing back-and-forth as if trying to think of something to say. When he saw me, he fled.

BARBARA

Why didn't you do something - call security.

NURSE

He was carrying flowers, not a gun. Must be one of your traumatized ex-lovers.

BARBARA

You're all so incompetent around here. I could have been killed by some crazed maniac and you let him get away.

NURSE

You would not have been killed. He looked harmless enough.

BARBARA

Did you ever see a picture of a serial killer? Like that guy in Florida? They all look innocent. (pause) And just what good does it do to take my temperature? I'm supposed to be dying, if I'm not mistaken.

NURSE

You are mistaken, you're not dying.

BARBARA

Oh, yes I am. Doctor Wolf says five, maybe, six months at the most, and then when I'm gone, you're going to take your stupid charts and file them away in some dark, dank place in the cloud, whatever the hell that is. My temperature was 101 on such and such a date and no one will really care.

(The nurse puts the tablet
down on the bed.)

NURSE

You're 98.6, Barbara, not 101. Besides, you're in a hospital and we have certain rules and protocols to follow.

BARBARA

Will your rules and protocols cure my disease?

NURSE

The disease you have is not going to kill you. You'll be fine in a month.

BARBARA

I will not. I have leukemia. I was told very specifically that I had leukemia. So, let's stop all the poking and prodding and temperature taking and leave me alone to die in peace.

NURSE

What will it take to get it into your head that you are not, and I repeat this, you are not dying.

BARBARA

I am too. Dr. Wolf was very clear on that.

NURSE

Dr. Wolf was not very clear about it. That's why he put you in the hospital - to take more tests, to make sure of his diagnosis. You'll be out by tomorrow when the final tests are in. It's mono, Barbara.

BARBARA

It isn't, it's leukemia.

NURSE

Okay, you win, you're dying. In the meantime, please be more considerate. You are not making this very easy for us.

(The nurse turns and crosses to exit.)

BARBARA
(yelling after her)

Nor do I intend to. A person who is dying can choose how she wants to die. We can go out of here quietly or screaming and yelling. I prefer to scream and yell, so, if you don't like it, get a different job. And don't let any more serial killers in here, understand?

(Barbara collapses on the bed.)

BARBARA
Crap.

(Barbara lies there for a moment, then picks up her book and begins to read. Ian enters but stops. He looks at Barbara for a moment, then turns and exits. He returns after a beat, looks at Barbara once more and knocks. Barbara looks up from her book. Ian slowly enters and they stare at each other for a moment.)

IAN
Hello, Barbara, it's Ian. (pause) Ian Grafner.

BARBARA
I know who you are. The maniac with the flowers. (pause)
Nurse!

IAN
I am not a maniac.

BARBARA
Nurse!

(The nurse runs in.)

NURSE

What is going on?

BARBARA

Was this the crazed killer you were referring to?

(The nurse looks at Ian
carefully.)

NURSE

Yes, the man with the flowers.

BARBARA

Get him out of here. Now.

NURSE

Sir...

IAN

Ian, the name's, Ian.

NURSE

Ian, I don't think she wants you here.

IAN

Yes, I know that. I knew that before I even got to the hospital. I knew that five years ago; I knew that twenty years ago. Just give me ten minutes.

BARBARA

No.

NURSE

I don't think so.

IAN

Five minutes, then.

NURSE
(to Barbara)

Five minutes?

BARBARA

No.

NURSE
(to Barbara)

What's five minutes? He came all the way here to see you and brought flowers. Come on, Barbara, give him five minutes.

BARBARA

I will not give him five seconds.

NURSE

Barbara, you have been here two days and exactly one person has been here to see you, your accountant. So the way I see it, you need all the friends you can get. Give it a chance. (pause) Ian, you have five minutes.

(The nurse exits.)

BARBARA

Bitch.

IAN

Okay, five minutes. That will do, I guess.

BARBARA

No it will not do.

(Ian and Barbara stare at each other for a couple beats. Barbara picks up her book and ignores Ian. Ian stands there nervously, holding the flowers.)

IAN

Here, I brought these for you.

(He puts the flowers down on
the bed.)

BARBARA

Give them to the girl next door. She just had a nose job.

IAN

I don't think so.

BARBARA

Well, then give them to the old lady in 426. She has about
two minutes to live. If you move fast you can probably get
there before she goes. It might make her last two minutes
on earth something memorable.

IAN

Okay, let's try this again.

BARBARA

Let's not.

(Ian exits, waits a beat, then
enters.)

IAN

Hi Barbara, it's Ian Grafner. Remember me? We dated years
ago and I was in the neighborhood, heard you were sick, so
decided to drop by and say hello.

(He reaches into his pocket
and pulls out a card.)

Here's my card.

(She takes the card and throws
it on the bed.)

BARBARA

Screw you.

(Barbara continues to read and turns her back on Ian.)

IAN

Okay, one more time.

BARBARA

No.

(Ian exits and quickly enters.)

IAN

Hi. Is this the room for Barbara Tepinski? I've been roaming the halls and it seems that every room I look into, there's this mean woman who just wants to rip my head off. I'm Ian Grafner, by the way.

BARBARA

Oh, crap, Ian. Leave me alone, please?

IAN

I knew this was a bad idea. I sat in the car for half an hour going back and forth over whether I should visit you. I must have been mad to think this would work.

BARBARA

It was mad. Go back to your car, Ian. Go home.

IAN

Okay, Barbara, look, you win. I'm sorry to hear that you're sick and I hope you can beat whatever it is you have. Good luck.

(Ian slowly exits.)

BARBARA

Thank God.

(After a few beats Barbara looks up from her book and then at the flowers. She picks them up and smells them. Ian enters.)

IAN

Caught you.

(Barbara puts the flowers back down on the bed and returns to her book.)

BARBARA

You are still insufferable.

(The nurse enters.)

NURSE

Time's up.

IAN

What? Are you sure?

NURSE

Yes.

IAN

It didn't feel like five minutes.

BARBARA

It did to me.

NURSE

Barbara, you want me to throw him out of here?
(Barbara continues to read)

Well?

BARBARA

(softly)

Five more minutes.

NURSE

What?

BARBARA

Five more minutes.

IAN

Really?

BARBARA

Yes, I guess.

NURSE

You're sure about this?

BARBARA

No, I'm not sure about anything right now.

NURSE

Okay, another five minutes.

(The nurse exits. Barbara
looks at Ian.)

BARBARA

And don't take it as a sign of weakness, because it's not.

IAN

No, I wouldn't. Really.

BARBARA

I can't believe you had the nerve to show your face after
all these years.

IAN

I don't know whether I'd call it nerve. Maybe, stupidity
would be better.

BARBARA

So, it was stupid to come and visit me?

IAN

Yes, yes it was stupid. Look how this has turned out. You're pissed off, once again, at me; I feel like I always did when we were fighting; and the poor nurse is stuck in the middle of all this. Just like old times, except we didn't have a nurse in the middle. Which, come to think of it...no I won't go there. Barbara, I didn't do this to make your life more unhappy than it already is.

BARBARA

No? Then why did you show up here?

IAN

You've been on my mind lately and I heard you were sick. Is that so wrong?

BARBARA

Yes, maybe it is wrong. Do you have any recollection of how our relationship ended?

IAN

Yes, of course. It ended as all real tragedies end, poorly. But on the way over here, I was thinking that for most of our time together, it was good. We cared about each other, maybe even loved each other. To be honest, I don't even have any bad memories.

(She shoots him a look of disgust.)

IAN

Okay, maybe a few. Look, I just wanted to come by and see you again, see how you were doing and, maybe, make amends for all the shit in the past. It just felt like the right thing to do. I'm sorry. (pause) Too many years, too much water under the bridge, or some bullshit like that.

(Barbara slowly puts the book down and turns and looks at Ian.)

BARBARA

I don't know what the hell you are doing here. You know, it's bad enough dealing with the doctors and nurses and dying and...

IAN

Dying? You're dying?

BARBARA

Yes, I'm dying. I have six months to live, or so they say.

IAN

Holy shit. Michael Potter told me you were sick but he didn't say anything about you dying.

BARBARA

Michael Potter? I haven't seen or talked to him in ten years. How does he know what's going on with me?

IAN

I don't know. Facebook or something. You know, one person post something and another person shares it and before you know it, bang, the whole fucking planet knows, even me.

BARBARA

What crap.

(Ian crosses to the chair and sits.)

IAN

Dying? Six months to live. Shit, I don't know what to say. I wish I had known before I came over here.

BARBARA

What, then you wouldn't have come?

IAN

No, of course I would have come. It just would have been good to know. (pause) Fuck, Barbara, I'm so sorry.

BARBARA

Oh, stop being so dramatic.

IAN

I'm not being dramatic. (pause) Okay, I'm being dramatic, but this is something that calls out for some drama, don't you think? For Christ sake, you're dying.

BARBARA

Your compassion is a bit late, I'm afraid.

IAN

Barbara, please. Come on. Let's just try and have a civil conversation.

BARBARA

I do not want to have a civil, uncivil, or any other type of conversation with you, so get the hell out of here.

IAN

No.

BARBARA

When we ended our rather unhappy affair twenty some years ago...

IAN

It was not an affair.

BARBARA

Oh, no? Then what would you call it?

IAN

A relationship. An affair is something you do with someone who happens to be married and not to you. We, on the other hand, were both single. We were dating, living together, having a relationship. It was not an affair. And it was twenty-five years ago and I can't believe you plan on taking all of this goddamn anger with you into the grave.

BARBARA

If I take it to the grave, that is my business and none of yours. You have made a bad day much worse. Now go.

(The nurse enters carrying a small plastic cup with pills.)

NURSE

The five minute extension is up and, Barbara, time for your fun pills.

BARBARA

Give them to the schmuck with the tie. I think he needs them more than I do.

NURSE

Just take them, Barbara.

(Barbara grabs a glass and takes the pills. The nurse picks up the flowers.)

NURSE

I'll put these in water so they don't die. Maybe we can save something around here. And, the next big issue, do I throw the schmuck with the tie out or does he stay?

BARBARA

I'll decide when you come back with the flowers.

(She gives Barbara a look and exits with the flowers.)

IAN

Looks like we're making progress.

BARBARA

Let's not get carried away, okay?

IAN

Barbara, I know I should walk out the door and not come back. But the way things turned out between us has always bothered me. I know it seems silly to think that something could bother me for all of these years, but it does. So, when I heard you were sick, I felt bad. I wanted to, somehow, make things okay between us. God knows why but that's how I feel.

BARBARA

Oh, poor little Ian. Have you been bothered all of these years? Have you been in pain over our breakup? If you recall, you were the one who started to make our relationship fall apart. How many little tarts were you schtuping while I went on my business trips?

IAN

Thousands, Barbara, thousands.

BARBARA

Well, now we finally have an honest answer.

IAN

Barbara, listen to yourself, for Christ sake. It has been twenty-five years. And I never once tried to cop some stupid plea and say I wasn't a prick. I was a total prick. I am sorry for... (pause) Crap, listen to me. You know something? I'm beginning to feel like I just stepped back in time, twenty-seven, twenty-eight years. It's as if we never split up and just kept fighting.

BARBARA

Okay, I've had enough now.

(Barbara gets up out of bed humming the "Twilight Zone" theme.)

IAN

Funny, that's funny.

(Barbara throws on a robe and slippers, and heads toward the door.)

IAN

Where are you going?

BARBARA

I'm taking a walk.

IAN

You're just walking out on me?

BARBARA

Yes. Be gone when I get back.

(She exits. Ian yells after her.)

IAN

No, I don't think so. I'm as stubborn as you are. If you think I came all the way over here just to be tossed out on my ass, you've got another thing coming. Go take your walk, I'll be here when you're done.

(Ian crosses to the bed and picks up Barbara's book. He crosses to the chair and sits. The nurse enters carrying the flowers in a small vase.)

NURSE

Where did she go?

IAN

She took off for a walk. Probably to visit the dying old lady in 426 to see if she could be added to her will.

(The nurse places the flowers
down on a table.)

NURSE

So, what's the decision? Do I throw you out of here or are you staying?

IAN

I have the feeling you're going to be throwing my ass out onto the sidewalk. But let me warn you, I do know a little karate.

NURSE

Well, now that I know that, I'll try and watch myself.
(pause) I get the feeling that Barbara is not that fond of you.

IAN

You noticed, huh?

NURSE

Yeah.

IAN

What the hell am I doing here? She hates my guts, just walked out on me, and here I am waiting like a schumck. I'm getting the hell out of here before she gets back.

(Ian gets up.)

NURSE

No.

IAN

No?

NURSE

She's going through a tough time. I'd hang around if I were you. Maybe she'll come around.

IAN

I don't think so. Too many years have gone by.

NURSE

How long has it been since you last saw her?

IAN

Twenty-five years.

NURSE

Twenty-five? Wow, that is a long time.

IAN

Yeah. Time has a way of dulling the mind to the past so the things that might not have been so good, now seem okay. And my dulled brain fondly remembered my relationship with Barbara. So, I thought what the heck, give it a shot. I heard she was sick and thought this might be a good time to renew our relationship. Maybe help her get better. And then I find out she's dying. Dying for Christ sake. What a mess.

NURSE

She told you she was dying?

IAN

Yeah.

NURSE

Well, don't get too depressed about it.

IAN

Are you crazy too? Not get depressed? She's dying for Christ sake.

NURSE

Sometimes miracles can happen. I've seen it often.

IAN

Really?

NURSE

Sure. We think someone is going to die, and just like that, they get better. About five years ago, there was this young woman in here with a brain tumor - a very large one. Looked bad for her. They did a biopsy and found it was cancer. They told her there was no sense in taking it out. It was too big, too far along and she had very little time to live. Fuck you, she says. Take the goddamn thing out of my head. I die, I die. So they operate, remove the tumor - it goes much easier than they thought, and then they find out it isn't cancer after all. Just a large benign tumor. They don't know how the first biopsy went wrong. I ran into her about a week ago and she's fine. Perfect. Married with one kid. So, keep your hopes up.

IAN

Wow! You think there might be some hope here?

NURSE

You never know. Could happen. (pause) Well, I've got to get back to work. Good luck.

(The nurse starts to exit.)

IAN

Wait a second. Let me ask you something that will sound kind of crazy, but I need some advice here.

NURSE

Medical?

IAN

No. Romantic.

NURSE

Romantic? Ok, shoot.

IAN

Let's say, you were involved with some guy years ago and all of a sudden he popped back into your life. He's a nice guy and out of the blue he asks you to start up the relationship again. Start dating. What would you do?

NURSE

I'd kill him. (pause) Just a joke. That's a tough one. Is that your plan with Barbara?

IAN

Well, it has been on my mind and I thought, what the hell, maybe it would work. But it does sound kind of crazy, doesn't it?

NURSE

Yeah, it does sound kind of nuts, if you ask me. For the short time that I have known her, Barbara doesn't seem like the type of person that would handle something like that very well. But, if the right guy did that for me, I'd probably jump for it.

IAN

So, you want to start dating?

(The nurse looks at Ian as if he were nuts.)

IAN

Just testing it out, to see how it would feel. Relax.

NURSE

I see.

IAN

Well, I shouldn't keep from your work. Thanks for the advice. I'll stick around until she gets back. What the hell else do I have to do?

NURSE

Good.

(The nurse exits. Ian sits.)

IAN

Jesus.

(The nurse returns with a tray of food and places it on the food cart.)

NURSE

You know, I was just thinking, if I were you, I'd give the dating thing a try. It sounds sort of romantic in a strange kind of way. Unless of course...

IAN

Of course what?

NURSE

Spending more than six months with Barbara is something you couldn't handle. Because I think she has much more than six months to live.

IAN

You really are optimistic about her condition.

NURSE

Yes.

IAN

Well, I'll think about.

NURSE

Okay.

(The nurse exits. Ian crosses to a table and picks up a newspaper. He sits and opens it. Barbara enters and looks at Ian for a moment.)

BARBARA

You're still here.

(Ian puts the paper down and looks at Barbara.)

IAN

No, actually, I left a few minutes ago. What you are looking at is a hologram. I had some other things to do, but I wanted to continue fighting with you. This seemed like a simple solution.

(Barbara climbs back into bed.)

BARBARA

Same sarcastic sense of humor.
(She looks at her food tray.)
What is this crap?

(Ian rises and crosses to Barbara's bed. He looks at the tray.)

IAN

It's roast beef with mashed potatoes and gravy, some interesting looking bean things and a nice little fruit cup. Not a bad meal for someone who's dying.

BARBARA

You're as mean as ever.

(Ian paces around the room.)

IAN

Look, I'm nervous, okay?

BARBARA

I'm the one who's dying. What do you have to be nervous about?

IAN

Okay, here it is. The real reason I came over here to see you. I've been thinking about this for about four weeks.

BARBARA

I can't wait to hear this.

IAN

Let's start dating again.

BARBARA

What?

IAN

Let's start dating again.

BARBARA

After twenty-five years?

IAN

Yes.

BARBARA

I gotta eat.

(Barbara takes a bite of food and makes a face.)

IAN

I'm serious, Barbara. Think about it. You have what, six months to live, max? What have you got to lose? They're going to release you soon, and then what? Go back to your condo and wait until death grabs you and takes you to never-never land? I know I wouldn't want to spend my last six months on this crazy planet counting my toes and waiting to die.

BARBARA

And spending my last six months with you would be a better option than counting my toes?

IAN

It is crazy, of course. But, listen to this. How crazy does this scenario sound? Two people meet, go out maybe twice over a two week period, and then head off on a two week trip and when they get back, start living together? Now that sounds pretty normal to me, Barbara. Any idea who would do such a crazy thing? (pause) Well?

BARBARA

We did. I was young and stupid. And it just seemed like the right thing to do at the time.

IAN

But this doesn't? Look, I'm doing pretty well with my business; I could easily take off for a month. We could go to Europe, travel around, and then we could come back here and you could die. You'll have plenty of time to plan this great funeral, and I could help.

(Barbara stares at Ian as if
he were nuts.)

IAN

Okay, so it's a stupid idea, to you, but not to me. Hey, I have to give myself a little credit for trying to make amends to someone I hurt long ago. You don't want to accept it, so be it. So, I will now take my leave of this lovely little hospital and this beautiful room of yours and say goodbye and good luck. Maybe we will meet again in the hereafter, if there is such fucking absurd place.

(Ian crosses to get his coat.)

BARBARA

Goddamn you. You are not walking out the door like that after your ridiculous display.

IAN

What?

BARBARA

What? You are insane, that's what.

IAN

Some things never change, right?

BARBARA

That's for sure, especially when it comes to you. How dare you come into my room and treat me as if I were some comical farce. I will not be made fun of by some idiotic joke of yours. Start dating?

IAN

It is not a joke.

BARBARA

You're serious?

IAN

Yes, I am.

BARBARA

Really? And did you expect me to leap to my feet and say yes?

IAN

No I don't expect you to say yes. I expect it will take days, weeks, months even, of persuasion on my part. But I do expect you to think about it. But don't take too long, because you are dying don't forget.

BARBARA

You always make everything sound so easy. Our relationship was very painful for me, if you recall.

IAN

It was painful for both of us. It didn't turn out as well as we would have liked. Christ, Barbara, we were young and stupid, and, like you said, it seemed like the right thing at the time. Hell, I was a stupid twenty five year old, impulsive, immature asshole, who had no idea what he was doing, let alone knowing how to treat a beautiful, young woman. I jumped around from one impulse to another and you got caught up in the middle. But you had your part in this. You were not the little victim you want to believe. We both walked away from that relationship in pain.

BARBARA

And now you are this solid, mature, responsible man whom everyone can count on.

IAN

No, I don't try to fool myself or anyone else anymore. I'm now an older, impulsive, immature, jerk. Like I said, some things never change.

(The nurse enters.)

NURSE

So, what's the verdict? Do I call security and have him tossed or is he staying?

BARBARA

Leave him be. He has a lot of lawyer friends. If we call security, who knows what he'll do.

NURSE

We'd probably find ourselves deep in some law suit, which doesn't sound very appealing. I'll leave you two alone then.

(The nurse exits.)

IAN

How's your brother? Jeffery, right? What's he been up to?

BARBARA

He's fine. Lives in Paris. Has been there for years now. Married a French woman and they have three kids.

IAN

And your sister? What was her name?

BARBARA

Jill.

IAN

Yes, Jill. She's okay?

BARBARA

Yes, she's fine. She lives in San Diego, is divorced and has two children. No problems in my family.

IAN

Except you.

BARBARA

Yes, except me. My life is a wreck. I've spent most of it working my ass off and, now that I'm going to die, I'm never going to be able to enjoy the fruits of my labor. Everything has turned rotten. And since we have moved into the small talk stage of this meeting, how are things with you?

IAN

Great. Couldn't be better. Things are going so well I decided to come over and visit an old friend who only wants to put her hand down my throat and pull my asshole out through my mouth. God. Let's see, where should I start? So many years to cover. Two marriages, three kids, two with the first wife and one with the second. The two oldest kids are on their own after graduating from college. The last kid is in college and costing me my left testicle. He decided to go to Yale and I got stuck paying for it.

BARBARA

And you're still married to the second wife but thought it would be fun to come over here and tease me with the idea of dating.

IAN

No, got divorced about three years ago.

BARBARA

Looks like you didn't have much luck with relationships either.

IAN

No, I just couldn't seem to get it right.

BARBARA

And you want to keep practicing on me. How nice. Sounds so romantic.

IAN

Oh, let's cut the crap, Barbara. All this cynical shit is stupid. What are we doing here? It's not like we're twenty years old. Everything that happened between us was so long ago it shouldn't even matter. If we can't at least be civil to each other, maybe I should get the hell out of here.

BARBARA

Sounds good to me. We've had our little chance to catch up. You've paid your respects to the dying and now can get on with your life with a clear conscience. Move on to the next woman who you can use for a few years and dump when you get bored.

IAN

Oh, hell. Take care of yourself, Barbara. Jesus. What the hell was I thinking?

(Ian crosses to his coat,
grabs it, and starts to exit.
The nurse enters.)

IAN

I tried. Not gonna work.

(He exits. The nurse crosses
to Barbara.)

NURSE

What the hell happened?

BARBARA

Nothing.

NURSE

That didn't look like nothing.

BARBARA

It's none of your damn business, now is it?

NURSE

No. I guess not. Are you finished with your food?

BARBARA

Yes.

NURSE

I was...

BARBARA

Look, I've had enough talk for tonight.

NURSE

Yes, of course you have.

(The nurse takes the tray and exits. Barbara picks up Ian's card and looks at it. She then sticks it in her book.)

BARBARA

Oh, crap.

(Barbara picks up the phone, pulls out Ian's card and starts to dial. She stops, thinks for moment, and hangs up. The nurse enters.)

BARBARA

Going to take my temperature again?

NURSE

No. I've decided to get myself fired from this rather nice hospital.

BARBARA

Now why would you do that?

NURSE

To relieve myself of all of the anger I have toward you. You have done nothing but bitch since you arrived here.

BARBARA

Look...

NURSE

Shut up, I'm talking. And if you don't like it, take it up with the hospital administrator. You've treated everyone of us like it was our fault that you were here. One of the best nurses in this hospital, Connie, decided to take a few days of vacation just so she wouldn't have to see you again. We've tried to treat you with respect and kindness and you repay us with abuse. When we realized that you didn't have leukemia but mono, you fought us at every turn, as if hanging on to the idea of dying was more important to you than living. You are not dying so you might as well get used to the idea. But if you really want to know what it's like to die, go talk to the woman in room 410, Anne. Because she really is dying and she's only twenty-seven. She has maybe two weeks to live. And I can guarantee you that her doctor is not going to come into her room tomorrow morning with all this great news about how they made a mistake and things will be all better in a few days. And no old boyfriend is going to show up with flowers and take her in his arms and say let's get out of here and enjoy life together. These next two weeks will be hell on earth for her. But you, you have way more than two weeks to live. Ten years, twenty years, who know maybe forty. So in the twelve hours that you will be with us, see if you can find just a tad of compassion for the people who work here. Have a good night.

(The nurse starts to exit.)

BARBARA

I'm sorry.

(The nurse turns back to
Barbara.)

I'm not the most stable person in the world and when life decides to take a shot at me, I tend to take it out on those around me. My parents learned that early on so they tried to keep difficult things from me for my own good. One week ago, my doctor sat me down in his office, looked at me in that very medically serious way that doctors can put on, and told me I was dying from leukemia. I sat there, like someone just shot me through the heart with a bullet. He says, just to be on the safe side, let's get a second opinion. Then, a few days later, I'm in your hospital and you're sticking me with needles, sucking fluids into your vials, and running off to your labs, looking for clues or answers. All the while I'm sure that I'm looking at the last six months of my life. Then another doctor shows up, all smiles, and says that wasn't a real bullet at all, just a blank. I'm fine, she says, that wasn't leukemia, it's just a little mono. So, who do I believe? The doctor behind curtain one or the doctor behind curtain two? They all expect you to jump up and smile and say, "all better now." But it doesn't work that way. Maybe doctor three shows up tomorrow to confirm doctor one.

NURSE

There is no doctor three. Tomorrow you will get the final results, walk out of here, go home and spend a few weeks recuperating from mono. Then you can get back to your life, unlike Anne in room 410.

BARBARA

Yes, my life. My wonderful life. I can't wait.

NURSE

Hey, I saw a pretty nice guy in here a few minutes ago. It might not be your dream, but it could be a start. Something to look forward to.

BARBARA

Ian? We'll see. I have his card.

NURSE

Well, I'd better get back to my other patients.

BARBARA

I am sorry. I'm not usually this bitchy, but sometimes I guess I just can't help it.

NURSE

It's okay, Barbara.

(The nurse exits. There is a knock on the door and Ian enters.)

BARBARA

So, you're back.

IAN

Yeah. I just went down to the waiting room at the end of the hall and sat there thinking about things. I realized that I was glad I came to see you, even if it didn't turn out the way I had imagined. So I came back to tell you that.

BARBARA

I still can't figure out why you came to see me. Twenty-five years is a long time, Ian. And the idea of us dating again? Wow, crazy.

IAN

Yeah, wow. (pause) You want to know what really got me thinking about you?

BARBARA

What?

IAN

About two months ago I was cleaning out some stuff from my garage. I opened a box and it was filled with old books that I tossed into the garbage. Then I noticed an envelope at the bottom of the box. Inside were old birthday, Valentines, Christmas cards, postcards, from you. I started reading them and, as hard as this will be for you to believe, I began to cry.

BARBARA

Oh stop it.

IAN

It's true. I read those cards and realized that you really did love me and I loved you. I was blind to that back then. Maybe just afraid of the whole thing or just too young. We could have been very good for each other, except that I started fucking it all up. I was never mad at you. I deserved everything you dished out. But reading those cards just got my mind going and it hasn't stopped since. Then about two weeks ago I was walking along Wells, near North Avenue. I hadn't been in that neighborhood for years. And guess what's still there?

BARBARA

I don't know. What?

IAN

Think.

BARBARA

I have no clue.

IAN

La Petite Fleur.

BARBARA

Really? Our favorite little French restaurant? It's still there?

IAN

Yeah. I couldn't believe it. It looks the same after all these years. Same old beat-up entrance, the sign hanging at an angle. And that old door, creaky as ever. I walked in and was just flooded with memories of you, of us. It felt so good to be back in that warm, friendly place. It was only about five thirty but I couldn't leave without having dinner. The place was empty, so I just sat down at our favorite table by the window. I sat looking out thinking how nice it would be if you were there, too. The owner came out - he must be eighty by now. "Bonsoir," he says and slowly ambles over to the table. Bonsoir, I say back. He hands me the menu and I order a glass of red wine. He starts to walk away, then stops and stares at me for a moment. "I know you from long ago. You came often with a very beautiful woman. Your wife? You are still together?" No, I tell him. "So sad, mon ami. So in love. I could see it in your eyes. Yes, so in love." Yes, so in love were we.

BARBARA

Maybe we were and just too afraid to admit it.

IAN

Could be. (pause) Well, needless to say, I didn't need the menu so I handed it back to him and ordered...

BARBARA

The escargot in the garlic butter with chopped mushrooms, beef Bourguignon, and a crepe with powdered sugar for dessert.

IAN

You remember.

BARBARA

I don't think I could forget that. You ordered that almost every time. They didn't even have to ask you what you wanted. They just brought it out. (pause) I don't know if I would have had the nerve to walk back in there. So many years ago; so many memories. But now it's the present and here we are, you and me, in my lovely little hospital room. And you don't know me and I don't know you. Who we were back then is not who we are now and all we have is our past together. Your two divorces sound like failures to you, if you look at them that way. I'd take that right now. Just to be able to say that I gave it a try, made the attempt. But I didn't. So now I'm in this stupid hospital and what few friends I do have, are too busy to come and visit. Most don't even know I'm here. And I certainly don't have a relationship with anyone significant, so I have had to deal with this alone. My fault, I guess. (pause) You want to know something scary?

IAN

What?

(Barbara pauses for a beat.)

BARBARA

Damn, I hate to admit this. But the longest relationship I ever had was with you, five years. What does that say for me?

IAN

All it says is that you didn't find the right guy. I knew by the second date with my first wife that she wasn't right for me, but I was afraid of being alone or something. So I said to myself that I'd grow to love her, but it didn't work out. I met my second wife one month after my divorce. Three months later we were married and two months after that she was pregnant. Good old impulsive Ian.

BARBARA

Shit. Look at us, Ian. Two old fuckers who are still trying to figure all this shit out. I thought by now I'd have life by the balls, but it has me by the throat and it seems to be winning.

IAN

Goddamn it, Barbara. You can beat this thing.

BARBARA

Yeah, I can beat it. Sure.

(The nurse enters.)

NURSE

I hate to break this up, but visiting hours are over. I guess I didn't have to throw you out on the street after all.

IAN

I was kind of hoping to get a chance to show off my karate skills.

NURSE

It will have to wait, I guess.

IAN

Yeah.

NURSE

You need anything, Barbara?

BARBARA

No, I'm fine.

NURSE

Take care now.

(The nurse exits.)

IAN

You don't have to deal with this alone.

BARBARA

You better go. Don't want to get all drippy over this.

IAN

Yeah. Don't want to get drippy. You used to say that all the time.

(Ian crosses to Barbara and takes her hand.)

BARBARA

Ian, please.

IAN

When you're released, give me a call.

BARBARA

I will.

IAN

I'm serious. And if I don't hear from you by next week, I'm calling you. In fact, I'll just come over.

BARBARA

Okay. I'll call.

IAN

See you soon.

(Ian starts to exit.)

BARBARA

Ian.

(He stops and turns back to
Barbara.)

IAN

Yeah?

BARBARA

Thanks for the flowers.

IAN

Sure.

(Ian exits. Barbara picks up
the book and reads for a few
beats. The phone rings and
Barbara answers it.)

BARBARA

Hello. (pause) Ian, you just left. Now what? (pause)
I'll call, I promise. Now goodnight. I need to get my
rest. (pause) Okay, okay.

(Barbara hangs up as the nurse
enters.)

NURSE

All right, I'll admit it. I'm just a damn nosey nurse. You
gonna get me fired?

BARBARA

Fired? No. I needed that scolding.

NURSE

Well then, did you tell him?

BARBARA

Tell him what?

NURSE

You know damn well what.

BARBARA

I haven't told myself yet. There is a hairsbreadth chance that it still could be leukemia.

NURSE

Yeah, that's true. And there is a chance that a meteor could come crashing through the roof of the hospital, slam through the ceiling and squash you like a bug. Worried about that, too?

BARBARA

Now that you mentioned it, I...

NURSE

Stop, forget I said anything. I better leave well enough alone. (pause) You'll be gone when I come in tomorrow, and though you've been a thorough pain in the ass, I really hope...

BARBARA

Enough. First Ian and now you. Way too drippy for me right now. But thanks for putting up with me.

NURSE

That's my job.

BARBARA

Yeah, right. Well, have a good night and thanks again.

NURSE

Sure. You have a good night, too.

(The nurse exits. Barbara picks up the book again and pulls out Ian's card. She looks at for a few beats and puts it back into the book. She puts the book on the nightstand and turns out the light.)

BARBARA

Ian Grafner. Holy shit.

Lights fade to black.

The End.