

**THE BACKACHE**

A traumedy

By Mary Ruth Clarke  
WGAE Registered

August 15, 2000  
Fourth ROUGH Draft

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## CHARACTERS

### **Mary Lou**

Late 30s, early 40s.

### **Margaret**

An aspect of Mary Lou. A pragmatist.

### **Louis**

Another aspect of Mary Lou. Highly sensitive.

### **Actor 1**

Male. Plays Donnie, Mary Lou's mate. 40 to 50. A large carpenter. Also does several backstage voice-overs: Gary, Greg, VAX-D Sales Guy.

### **Actor 2**

Female. Plays all other roles - doctors, receptionists, friends, etc.

The action takes place in multiple locations, which are simply suggested. One non-descript bed may suffice for Mary Lou's bedroom scenes and the multiple doctor's offices and surgery center scenes. There is no break in the action between scenes, but there might be a change in lighting.

A large light board, such as that used for x-rays is used intermittently throughout. A microphone should be placed backstage for voice-over purposes.

**YOGA STUDIO.**

**Bodies in silhouette, including Mary Lou, practicing postures.**

**YOGITES**

We're inhaling light  
exhaling toxins  
downwarding dogs  
worshipping suns  
deep belly breathing into poses  
taking each a little deeper  
hence we feel deeper  
we're Zen calm  
Herculean strong  
because of this physical  
this mental sense  
of well being.  
Namaste.

**Mary Lou comes forward into the light as Yogites disappear.**

**MARY LOU**

But I have this pain...

**She rubs her lower left back.**

**MARY LOU'S BEDROOM**

**She carefully gets on the bed.**

**MARY LOU**

I have no specific memory of injuring it. It's been creeping upon me gradually I suppose, but now it has my full attention.  
**(Palms together, chanting)** *Already well already well already -*

**Louis and Margaret crawl out from underneath the bed.**

**LOUIS**

*(Joining in)* already well already well **(To audience)** Hi. Thanks for coming. I'm Louis and this is Margaret. We're a couple of Mary Lou's "aspects."

**MARGARET**

Essentially we're a theatrical conceit.

**LOUIS**

So by all means, suspend your disbelief. Just go with it.

**MARGARET**

We're here to assist Mary Lou in the telling of her tale.

**LOUIS**

And we don't particularly like each other.

**MARGARET**

Aspects rarely do. Nonetheless, we are working together for this common cause. Shall we proceed?

**MARY LOU**

Yes my friends, let's.

**LOUIS**

Oh, let's!

**The phone rings. Louis hands it to Mary Lou.**

**JANE (V.O.)**

Where were you? We did hanging wall dogs.

**MARY LOU**

Hi Jane. I've still got this --

**JANE (V.O.)**

Chiropractic College.

**MARY LOU**

What?

**JANE**

I'm telling you what to do.

**MARY LOU**

I have no specific memory of injury -

**JANE**

and it's *safer* than going to a real chiropractor -

**MARY LOU**

What?

**JANE**

because they're more *careful* -

**MARY LOU**

Who?

**JANE**

because they're *students*. They cured my shoulder, I'm telling you!

**MARY LOU**

Oh Jane, I don't think I need to do anything extreme like see a doctor.

**JANE**

But I am telling you -

**MARY LOU**

I know, I hear you. Thanks. But I already know how to heal myself.

**JANE**

You do? Did you take a class?

**MARY LOU**

Jane, I've lived with this body for 37½ years. I know it will heal itself -- it always has, with a strain or a sprain. I'm lying in Savasana on the bed and practicing a little restfulness.

**JANE**

Savasana -

**MARY LOU**

- Corpse pose -

**JANE**

I know what Savasana is, we just *finished* final meditation. I fell asleep. I always fall asleep. I think I have that narcolepsy. Anyway, you've got to come Friday. We're doing the inverted cow.

**MARY LOU**

Great. I will see you Friday.

**JANE**

Okay. Namaste!

**MARY LOU/LOUIS**

*Already well Hail Mary already well Our Father already well.*

**MARGARET**

Cut to 3 weeks later.

**MARY LOU**

Arghhh!

**LOUIS**

The pain is not diminished.

**MARGARET**

But the convalescence? Exhausting.

**MARY LOU**

I feel invisible crumbs on these just-laid sheets. I'm tired of breathing. My consciously honed female biceps have deflated. Look at my feet - involuntarily jiggling for want of activity.

**LOUIS**

Exercise is how she keeps her demons at bay and now they sit next to her on the bed.

**MARY LOU**

I'm fairly certain they're the ones dropping the invisible crumbs on the sheets.

**Phone rings**

**GWEN (V.O.)**

It's Gwen. How's your back?

**MARY LOU**

Any romantic fantasies I've ever had about becoming a languorous invalid have completely vanished.

**GWEN (V.O.)**

Go see Judith Portnoy, she's a great gal, she has a very successful chiropractic practice right on Armitage across from that Starbucks, she helped me when I sprang my ankle that time!

**MARY LOU**

Oh, all right.

**Mary Lou hangs up, gets up.**

**LOUIS**

She hobbles down the hall to her office.

**MARY LOU**

CUT. I do not hobble. I inhibit the desire to hobble.

**MARGARET**

She's a practitioner of the Alexander Technique.

**LOUIS**

Right. Sorry. Alexander Technique...

**MARY LOU**

One of the tenants of which is the inhibition of detrimental habitual responses.

**LOUIS**

Right, right...

**MARY LOU**

I do not compensate for the pain in my back by hunching and scrunching. I am walking upright. I am allowing my neck to release so that my head floats upward, I am releasing my shoulders out to the sides, I am allowing my torso to release in length and width, I am allowing my legs to release away from my pelvis -

**LOUIS**

She releases herself down the hall to her office. Vestibule into her aspirations. File cabinets bulge with her plays, screenplays, poems and miscellaneous musings. After her death she hopes someone scavenges her office for traces of brilliance.

**MARY LOU**

Shhh!



**She pulls out her health insurance policy.**

**MARY LOU**

I don't even know what chiropractic-tory is.

**She immerses herself in the policy.**

**LOUIS**

On January 1st her Writer's Guild insurance ran out. You see, she and Greg wrote and "starred in" a lovely little black comedy film called Meet the Parents. ROGER EBERT LOVED IT. It was such a big little hit that they shopped it around assuming offers would roll in from Hollywood and Broadway and they would become famous character actor/screenwriter/playwrights. A million various Hollywood creepoids promised to do this and that but somehow they signed away the movie to Universal Studios who says they are going to re-make the lovely little black comedy because they LOVE IT SO MUCH. Secretly she hopes they will let her keep her part in the remake and not give it to that Joan Cusack who is like her but taller, younger, and a famous movie star.

**MARY LOU**

Shhhh!

**LOUIS**

It's in "development" which is to say a series of script doctors are operating and 7 years into this *nightmare* - "process" -- her insurance runs out and if she wants to continue she could give up her health club habit, bottled water, her vitamin regimen, sun block 45, that fabulous new Clinique anti aging serum, and her twice annual teeth cleaning - she'd need to give all of this up to afford that health insurance.

**MARY LOU**

Forget that. Besides, I've never even once used that insurance in 7 years. Nothing ever happens to me!

**V.O.: Theme music from Jaws**

**MARGARET**

So she called Julie and asked her what kind of health insurance she had just gotten. Julie does a thorough cost/benefit analysis for every purchase and Mary Lou says -

**MARY LOU**

Gimme the number for the cheapest one, nothing ever happens to me.

**V.O.: Theme music from Jaws**

**MARGARET**

February 1st she becomes insured by Community Mutual. \$2000 deductible, 60/40 plan, \$134 a month. And here it is, February 23 -

**MARY LOU**

Arghh! Who the hell can read this policy?

**Hands the policy to Louis, holds her hand out for a phone**

**(On phone)** Julie? Is chiropractory spinal manipulation? Because the last bullet point under Exclusions says this Insurance doesn't cover spinal manipulation and I think chiropractory is spinal manipulation, isn't it?

**JULIE (V.O.)**

Why don't you go to a real doctor, he'll give you pills. Oy - hold on.

**Julie clicks off**

**MARGARET**

Why don't you go to a real doctor?

**MARY LOU**

I don't know any real doctors. I get an annual pap smear at a women's health collective run by lay practitioners. Joan said chiropractors, Lynn said chiropractors, so I'm thinking -

**Julie clicks back on**

**JULIE (V.O.)**

Gary, are you there?

**GARY (V.O.)**

That I am, Jules.

**JULIE (V.O.)**

Gary, this is Mary Lou. Hi, Hi. Gary is an insurance specialist. Mary Lou needs to know if chiropractic is spinal manipulation because if it is, she's screwed.

**GARY (V.O.)**

That it is, Jules.

**JULIE (V.O.)**

Thanks Gary.

**Mary Lou hangs up**

**MARY LOU**

Damn.

**LOUIS**

**(Reading the old policy)** This old policy covers everything. What's temporomandibular joint dysfunction?

**Mary Lou punches herself in the nose.**

**MARY LOU**

I'll have to eat this one.

**MARGARET**

The very next day she hops on the bus and travels 10,000 miles east to the heart of hip where Dr. Judith Portnoy's office resides.

**They wave her off.**

**LOUIS**

Namaste!

**MARGARET**

What is this "namaste?"

**LOUIS**

I bow to the divine in you. Well, maybe not in *you*, Margaret, but that's the idea.

**PORTNOY'S OFFICE**

**MARY LOU**

I thought chiropractory was a weird alternative medicine, but it's just like a real doctor's office!

**She picks a pamphlet off a rack.**

**PAMPHLET VOICE OVER**

Chiropractic has the highest success rate for alleviating lower back pain.

**MARY LOU**

Wow, I am right where I need to be! Not a feeling I experience often.

**Dr. Judith Portnoy briskly strides in, shakes Mary Lou's hand.**

**LOUIS**

Dr. Judith Portnoy is her age, but successful.

**Mary Lou scowls at him.**

**PORTNOY**

Have a seat, Mary Ruth.

**MARY LOU**

Mary Lou.

**PORTNOY**

Mary Lou. What seems to be the problem?

**MARY LOU**

I have a backache and it's not going away!

**PORTNOY**

Show me where it hurts, Mary Beth.

**MARY LOU**

Here.

**PORTNOY**

Here?

**MARY LOU**

There.

**PORTNOY**

Right there? In the lower left lumbar?

**MARY LOU**

That's the spot. In my lower left lumber. Lumbar.

**PORTNOY**

Touch your toes.

**Mary Lou easily does this.**

**PORTNOY**

And arch back for me.

**Mary Lou easily does this.**

**PORTNOY**

Does that hurt?

**MARY LOU**

Yes.

**PORTNOY**

More or less?

**MARY LOU**

Than what?

**PORTNOY**

Than it normally would.

**MARY LOU**

It doesn't normally hurt, does it?

**PORTNOY**

You tell me.

**MARY LOU**

Normally this doesn't hurt.

**PORTNOY**

Any pain down either leg?

**MARY LOU**

No.

**PORTNOY**

Any numbness?

**MARY LOU**

Numbness?

**PORTNOY**

You don't feel any tingling or numbness in your feet or legs?

**MARY LOU**

No. Should I?

**PORTNOY**

When is your pain the worst? Oh - you can stop arching now.

**MARY LOU**

Well, it worse all the time.

**PORTNOY**

What is the pain like?

**MARY LOU**

Like?

**PORTNOY**

Sharp? Stabbing? Dull?

**MARY LOU**

No...

**PORTNOY**

Throbbing? Stinging? Burning?

**MARY LOU**

No...

**PORTNOY**

Piercing? Obtuse? Caustic?

**MARY LOU**

No... **(To audience)** Perhaps for the first time ever, *words* fail me. **(To Portnoy)** It's sort of like a migraine kind of but in my back. Aspirin doesn't help. I don't like to take it anyway.

**PORTNOY**

Tylenol?

**MARY LOU**

It doesn't help and I don't like to take that either.

**PORTNOY**

Ibuprofen?

**MARY LOU**

I take that for cramps. But I don't like to.

**PORTNOY**

All righty. I don't think we're looking at anything serious here, Mary Ann. You've got a lot of stress in your life.

**MARY LOU**

No.

**PORTNOY**

Who doesn't, right? I doubt this is a disc problem.

**MARY LOU**

That would be bad?

**PORTNOY**

But to make sure, I think we'll x-ray you and see what we've got.

**MARY LOU**

I should tell you I've never actually been to a chiropractor before. I don't know what it is you do.

**PORTNOY**

No problem, we have an informative video. Let's get that x-ray, okay?

**Flash, x-ray appears on the light board.**

**MARY LOU**

OH MY GOD, what are those up there, doctor?

**PORTNOY**

Those are your bra underwires, Mary Ellen. The good news is that the spaces between these discs are intact so what we're not looking at is a slipped disc.

**MARY LOU**

That's a relief, huh?

**PORTNOY**

But you have a moderate subluxation. And as you can see, your sacrum is askew.

**MARY LOU**

Oh God.

**PORTNOY**

Not to worry, we can adjust it. Do you have any questions?

## **BIG MUSICAL NUMBER: THIS SHOULD NOT BE HAPPENING TO ME!**

This x-ray is intriguing  
That's very plain to see  
But honestly I must confess  
I'd rather it not be me...

I keep abreast of updates on nutrition  
I try to buy organic when I can  
Gulp vitamins and minerals, quaff herbal tea  
And try my best to question the hyperbole

I take pride as a self-disciplinarian  
And also more or less a vegetarian  
I'm a savvy self-respecting fine American  
And expect I'll be a spry octogenarian.

This should not be happening to me  
This is not the thing that should occur  
I am not a dame who's eager to complain  
But tell me why am I in this awful pain?

I run track I lift weights I aerobicise  
I tone I limber up I isotonic  
Not that I want to sound like a colossal bore  
But I spend hours strengthening my core

Ashtanga! Iyengar! Pilates!  
Has made me rather buff (well buff enough)  
My rosy healthy glow, I've had a hand in it  
I dance wildly and with abandonment!

I know the proper way to life the laundry  
With ease I sit myself upon a chair  
My office boasts of high tech ergonomics  
I even have good posture during sex!

This should not...

**MARY LOU**

Oh, that felt good. I haven't done that in years.

**LOUIS**

**(To Margaret)** Is this a musical?



**Margaret shrugs.**

**PORTNOY**

Well, I really couldn't say how this happened to you, Ruth Ann. But we'll have you "back" in business in no time.

**MARY LOU**

Dr. Portnoy, how much does an adjustment cost?

**PORTNOY**

\$50.

**MARY LOU**

And how many will I need?

**PORTNOY**

I'd like to see you 3 times a week to start, and then we'll taper off as you progress.

**MARY LOU**

It's a deal!

**PORTNOY**

**(Shaking her hand)** Nice to meet you, Beth Marie.

**Portnoy disappears**

**MARY LOU**

I have had a delightful time.

**Mary Lou holds out her hand for the phone.**

Seek and ye shall find. **(on phone)** Gwen, I've been to Dr. Judith Portnoy and I have had a delightful time.

**GWEN (V.O.)**

Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you?

**MARY LOU**

**(Hangs up, picks up again.)** Jane, I've been to Dr. Judith Portnoy, and I have had a delightful time.

**JANE**

WHO?

**MARY LOU**

A chiropractor.

**JANE**

Why didn't you go to the Chiropractic College? I told you to go to the Chiropractic College.

**MARY LOU**

Jane, you're not being very supportive. I have subluxation and an askew sacrum, you know.

**JANE**

You're going to spend a buttload of money.

**MARY LOU**

Hey, you get what you pay for!

**Mary Lou hangs up**

**DON**

Hi honey, I'm home!

**MARGARET**

Enter Mary Lou's mate, Donald.

**Mary Lou and Don kiss.**

**MARY LOU**

How are you, honey?

**DON**

I got a bursitis coming on in my right shoulder something fierce, I put a staple through my arm and my knees are killing me.

**MARGARET**

Donald is a sculptor and a carpenter.

**LOUIS**

An artist and an artisan.

**DON**

How's your back?

**MARY LOU**

Come look at my x-ray, honey.

**MARGARET**

He works on the big budget films that come to town. Building sets, rigging special effects -

**LOUIS**

They've been in love for 9 years.

**MARGARET**

They are not married.

**LOUIS**

Hasty marriage seldom proveth well. Shakespeare.

**Margaret scowls at him**

**DON**

**(Looking at x-ray)** Oh my God, what're those up there?

**MARY LOU**

My bra underwires, honey. Donnie, thank you for being such an understanding peach during my infirmity, but it's really going to be okay. All I had to do was make an effort to find help. I wish I'd called that Dr. Judith Portnoy 3 weeks ago, let's watch this informative video, shall we?

**(A short cheaply-made video plays on the TV screen.)**

## Visual

On Peppy people entering  
Doctor's office

On quizzical patient

On cartoon smiley nerves  
dancing through cells,  
tissues, organs.

On a brain being covered by  
a skull.

On spinal bones covering a  
cord.

On man lifting and grabbing  
lower back

One woman hitting golf ball  
gripping mid back

On man at computer  
rubbing neck

On sad faced nerves

On extremely attractive  
chiropractor joyfully  
explaining an X-ray to a  
patient.

On quizzical patient.

On extremely attractive  
chiropractor walking up to  
the prone patient and  
laying his hands on her  
back.

On smiling patient,  
enjoying her adjustment.  
Ahh! On patient shaking  
chiropractor's hand.

**Audio**  
**NARRATOR**

Welcome to chiropractic!

Adjustments are safer than  
aspirin! **MUSIC SWELL**

**PATIENT**

I think I'd like to go to a  
chiropractor, but I'm  
hesitant. Tell me, what **is**  
chiropractic?

**NARRATOR**

Chiropractic is based on  
the scientific fact that  
your nervous system  
controls the function of  
every cell, tissue, organ  
and system of your body.  
Your brain is protected by  
the skull, and your spinal  
cord by the 23 moving bones  
of the spine.  
Many every day activities  
can cause these spinal  
bones to lose their normal  
position or motion. This  
can result in nervous  
system dysfunction and  
ultimately, ill health.

A Chiropractic doctor  
returns individual spinal  
bones to their proper  
motion and position.

**PATIENT**

How do they do that?

**NARRATOR**

Your primary course of care  
will be specific  
chiropractic adjustments.  
Like lifting a heavy rock  
off your toe, most patients  
report their chiropractic  
adjustment feels good.



**MARGARET**

3 times a week, for 3 months, Mary Lou ventures to the heart of hip for her adjustments.

**Mary Lou on adjustment table. Amplified bone-cracking sounds.**

**PORTNOY**

Oooh, that was a good one.

**MARY LOU**

Dr. Portnoy, I think this might not be working for me. I'm thinking maybe I should go to a real doctor. Oh - not that you're not a real doctor, that's not what I meant, I meant an **MD** type of real doctor and I was wondering if you could maybe look in my PPO book and see if you know any. Do you know any?

**MARGARET**

Dr. Judith Portnoy finds Mary Lou a recommendation.

**PORTNOY**

Good luck, Ann Marie.

**Portnoy exits.**

**LOUIS**

Do you think Dr. Portnoy would have let Mary Lou continue indefinitely, if she hadn't spoken up?

**MARGARET**

Are you questioning Dr. Portnoy's ethics?

**LOUIS**

Oh no. I was just wondering.

**Phone rings. Louis hands it to Mary Lou.**

**JANE (V.O.)**

Meet me at the opening of this new play. I just got comp tickets. I'll see you in the lobby in an hour.

**MARY LOU**

I can't sit through a play, Jane.

**JANE**

Are you avoiding me? Every time I *call* you with an exciting activity -

**MARY LOU**

I'm in *pain* Jane. I wasted \$2 grand and I've lost 4 months of my life. *4 months!*

**JANE**

But it's just a silly *backache*. You should have gone to the Chiropractic College -

**MARY LOU**

Arghhhh-

**JANE**

What is your *problem?! Look, never mind, I'll ask someone who isn't trying to avoid me.*

**They both hang up.**

**LOUIS**

Jane has no idea how much pain Mary Lou is in, does she?

**MARGARET**

How can anyone comprehend another person's pain?

**LOUIS**

Oooh, you're cold.

**MARGARET**

I can *imagine* it, but no, I can not *feel* someone's pain.

**LOUIS**

Well, I can.

**MARGARET**

Oh, you've given me such a headache.

**LOUIS**

Have I?

**MARGARET**

Can't you see it? Can't you feel it?

**LOUIS**

I can *empathize*.



**MARGARET**

There is an intrinsic element of detachment with physical pain, do you see? We're each of us an island in our suffering.

**LOUIS**

Not if I was Vulcan. Like Spock. You know - Star Trek. Pointy ears.

**Louis mind melds Margaret**

**MARGARET**

What are you doing?

**LOUIS**

I'm feeling your pain. If Mary Lou could mind meld with Dr. Judith Portnoy, perhaps she would have been healed.

**(accusing)** You don't really have a headache, do you?

**Margaret brushes him away. Louis gives the Vulcan peace sign.**

**LOUIS**

Live long and prosper.

**MARGARET**

Will you cut that out!

**X-ray back on light board. Mary Lou gets into a hospital gown. Dr. Wormer, back to the audience, is preparing something we can not see.**

**MARGARET**

Dr. Janice Wormer is an orthopedic *surgeon*. But not to worry, she has looked at Mary Lou's x-ray and says that there's nothing for me to have surgery on.

**WORMER**

Clearly the problem is inflammation of the sacral iliac joint. Not unusual, I'll write you a prescription for a muscle relaxer, and administer a shot of steroids which will alleviate the symptom.

**MARY LOU**

Steroids?

**WORMER**

It won't be a lot of steroids, it won't be "systematic", it will be "sight specific."

**MARY LOU**

**(Joke)** So I won't be growing hair in unusual locations or going postal, huh?

**Wormer doesn't respond.**

**LOUIS**

**(Whispering)** Dr. Janice Wormer hath a plentiful lack of wit.

**MARY LOU**

**(Whispering)** Who cares? I'll be the patient of a computer chip as long as I can get on with my life.

**LOUIS**

I hope that shot doesn't hurt.

**Wormer, in surgical mask, turns around holding a gigantic syringe.**

**MARY LOU**

Dr. Wormer. My heavens, that's the biggest needle I ever did see! You're gonna stick that in my back?!

**Her laugh is not reciprocated. Wormer approaches.**

**MARY LOU**

ARGHHH!

**Wormer exits. Mary Lou takes off her hospital gown.**

**MARGARET**

Here is your prescription. No alcohol.

**MARY LOU**

ARGHHH!

**MARGARET**

Avoid sunlight. May cause oily discharges, mental confusion, paralysis and coma. Avoid operating heavy machinery.

**Mary Lou takes the pills.**

**LOUIS**

O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick.

**Mary Lou exits.**

**MARGARET**

By the time she walks to the train she's a smidge dopey around the peripherals.

**Lightboard: (still shots) Mary Lou waiting at train station.**

**MARGARET**

By the time she gets off the train every muscle in her body is relaxed.

**Mary Lou exiting train in a daze.**

**LOUIS**

The world is groovy and she is groovy in it.

**Mary Lou reeling among a crowd on a sidewalk.**

**MARGARET**

In poetry class, she fixes her gaze on a green Pilot pen.

**Mary Lou smiling at a green pen on the table.**

**LOUIS**

In the distance someone reads a poem.

**A poet reading aloud.**

**MARY LOU (V.O.)**

Such a lovely poem. Such a lovely room. Such beautiful people.

**Mary Lou leaning on poet sitting next to her.**

What a nice pen. I could love a pen like this.

**Mary Lou asleep on the table as poets surround her "What should we do?!"**

**Donnie enters, lugging Mary Lou over his shoulder, and flops her on the bed.**

**LOUIS**

Clearly, muscle relaxers are not a good option for this poet.

**MARGARET**

And when she calls Dr. Julie Werner's office -

**RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)**

**(Yawn)** I can give you early October

**MARY LOU**

But it is early June.

**RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)**

Doctor is very, very, very, very, very, very busy, do you want the appointment or not?"

**LOUIS**

How appalling. Hang up.

**MARGARET**

Take the appointment.

**LOUIS**

This is America, a customer demand a certain level of service and if it's not received; she takes her business elsewhere!

**MARGARET**

This is *medicine*, all customer service rules are invalid in this category.

**LOUIS**

Why?

**MARGARET**

Don't be absurd.

**LOUIS**

Why?

**MARGARET**

Because... because...a physician's time is very, very valuable. She has to *prioritize*, the most pressing cases must be

addressed first, surgeries must be committed, dictations dictated -

**LOUIS**

Golf must be played -

**MARGARET**

**(Ignoring him)** research must be pursued, papers published. Why, it's amazing that Dr. Julie Werner has time to see Mary Lou at all!

**RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)**

**(Yawn)** Do you want the appointment?

**LOUIS**

Wormer charged you \$290, you know.

**MARY LOU**

Geez, for one shot? I shall take my business elsewhere!

**Margaret hands Mary Lou her hospital gown.**

**LOUIS**

Dr. Dweezeldworf's office. Another examination room, another Listerine ambiance.

**DWEEZLEDWORF**

**(Heavy unintelligible accent)** Ber iss no barteecoolar batologee, Ah rit bou berscribsion bor bisicadedape.

**MARY LOU**

Bisicadedape?

**DWEEZLEDWORF**

Bisicadedape.

**MARY LOU**

I didn't do real well with the muscle relaxers. What is bisicadedape?

**DWEEZELDWORF**

Yah velcum.

**Hands her prescription and disappears.**

**MARGARET**

Which she promptly takes to the pharmacy.

**PHARMACIST**

Ma'am, I can't fill this prescription.

**MARY LOU**

Why not?

**PHARMACIST**

This is a prescription for physical therapy.

**Louis hands her the yellow pages.**

**MARGARET**

And so she finds herself a bisicadedapist.

**PHYSICAL THERAPIST #1**

I don't really see anything structurally wrong with your back. Here, have a Xerox of some sit-ups.

**Hands her a Xerox of sit-ups.**

**LOUIS**

But the sit-ups infuriate her pain. She seeks another bisicaderapist.

**PHYSICAL THERAPIST #2**

You have like 19 different problems. For the rest of your life, I want you to visualize that you're wearing a tight tight skirt, and your knees are glued together, okay?

**Mary Lou tries walking this way.**

**LOUIS**

**(To audience)** That's attractive.

**PHYSICAL THERAPIST #2**

Oh, and here's some sit-ups.

**Hands her a Xerox of sit-ups, disappears. Mary Lou attempts to lie on the floor while keeping her knees glued together.**

**MARY LOU**

This totally contradicts the Alexander Technique philosophy. How can I release when I'm squeezing?

**LOUIS**

And the sit-ups further infuriate her pain.

**She does one sit up. Remains on the ground.**

**MARY LOU**

Arghhh! This is some disaster comedy Greg and I would write, which would be funny, only it's MY LIFE. I guess with this damn pain, I have to keep overcoming my inherent fatalism.

**LOUIS**

Keep the faith.

**MARY LOU**

Not that I'm paranoid but I get the feeling the gods are up there laughing big belly laughs at me.

**LOUIS**

Oh, I don't think so. You're not that important. Is there a patron saint of backache?

**He wanders off. Margaret follows.**

**DON**

Hi honey, I'm home.

**MARY LOU**

Hi honey. How are you?

**DON**

I've got a 9-inch splinter in my paw, my knees are killing me, and some new guy dropped a bucket of wet plaster on my foot. How's your back?

**She grimaces.**

**DON**

How's your front?

**MARY LOU**

Kiss me fool.

**With verbal effort, Don joins her on the floor. Kisses her.**

**MARY LOU**

I'm getting fat.

**DON**

More of you to luv.

**MARY LOU**

Oh sure, you say that now. If I'd known my well-honed muscles would turn to cellulite when I stopped using them, I maybe wouldn't have honed them in the first place.

**DONNIE**

Watch it, that's the body I adore that you're knocking.

**He kisses her.**

**MARY LOU**

What am I doing wrong here?

**DONNIE**

Nothing, sugar pie.

**MARY LOU**

Who should I see next?

**DON**

I don't know. How can I help you?

**MARY LOU**

I guess you should just continue feeling sorry for me and bring me the occasional treat.

**DON**

They asked me to go sink a plane downstate in the Ohio River, but I told them no go.

**MARY LOU**

Why?

**DON**

Because I got an invalid chick on my hands.

**MARY LOU**

**(Sits up)** Oh Donnie - you should go. You love that special effects stuff. And any day now I'll surely heal of my own accord.

**DON**

The money would be damned good. I could take the rest of the year off and do some real sculpting.



**MARY LOU**

Well, there you are. Always pursue the art. It's our #1 rule, right? So go. I'm sick of the sight of you.

**DON**

I don't know - I'll be gone 6 or 7 weeks. I better have a security system installed.

**MARY LOU**

Why?

**DON**

Our building has 37 windows and 9 doors. It's summer in the city. You'd be a woman alone.

**MARY LOU**

I see your point.

**DON**

Okay. Well if you think you'll be all right honey bunchkins...

**MARY LOU**

Greg told me *Meet The Parents* is sitting on *Jim Carey's manager's desk*, so I'm sure I'll be quite busy, what with celebrity interviews and fighting off agents who want to sign me and whatever.

**DONNIE**

Well, I guess I'll go sink a plane in the Ohio River.

**MARY LOU**

I'll be fine. It's only pain. Certainly I can rise above it. Can you help me up?

**He helps her to her feet.**

**MARY LOU**

Good bye my love. When next you see me, I'll be right as rain.

**Big music swell as they kiss goodbye. He flexes his biceps and she waves him off. Margaret and Louis enter.**

And by my troth, I vow I shall be healed by the time my lord returns.

**Mary Lou sneezes.**

**MARGARET**

She catches *GARDEN* fever. An annual infection.

**Mary Lou pulls out a potted plant or two.**

**LOUIS**

She has no idea what she's doing. She buys plants based on their names - Appleblossom Dream, Neon Rose. Maybe she should choose doctors in the same fashion.

**MARY LOU**

I'll be damned if an ache gets in the way of my annual stab at being a horticulture girl, nurturing my humble urban Eden, my rooftop paradise. And maybe I've been approaching this pain all wrong. Donnie works through his pain, and so can I.

**MARGARET**

It is a rainy, frigid Chicago June and she sets up planting headquarters in the garage, under the sunroof.

**LOUIS**

While she opens up big bags of peat moss and compost, her pain flares like a Cherry Queen. Do you think this is wise?

**MARY LOU**

Yes. She says with great resolve.

**MARGARET**

She becomes an ice pack with a body attached. She devises this

**Mary Lou puts on ice sling**

attractive sling out of an old pair of panty hose, forgets she has it on and walks around in public wearing a panty hose tied around her hips like a holster.

**LOUIS**

The scary thing is how many people don't notice it. She develops a freezer burn as it heats up outside. You

realize all this has to be hauled up the stairs to the rooftop?

**Theme song from Rocky begins**

**MARGARET/LOUIS**

**(Greek chorus)**

500 pots up the stairs  
500 pots into the warming sun.  
Oh magical of the physical.  
To sweat; a treat  
Breathlessness sublime!

**Theme song from Rocky abruptly ends**

**MARY LOU**

ARGHHH!

**MARGARET/LOUIS**

**(Greek chorus)**

Horizontal for 5 days  
she rises only  
to water the fruits of her labor.

**Mary Lou on bed**

**MARY LOU**

Stupid stupid stupid how could I be so stupid stupid -

**LOUIS**

St. Lawrence.

**MARY LOU**

Huh?

**LOUIS**

Patron saint of the spine. I would suggest you invoke him.  
Would you like me to light a candle?

**MARY LOU**

That's all right.

**LOUIS**

**(To Margaret)** Off, off, exit for the prayers.

**Mary Lou kneels (with care) and blesses herself.**

**MARY LOU**

Dear St. Lawrence. Could you see fit to ask the big Guy if she would send me some relief? Or let me know what steps to take? I know I'm not supposed to ask the Why me question. I know the universe is far more complex than the logic of a middle-y-aged lady with a backache. I know, all over the world, people are in a lot worse shape than I am. Still. I need to get back to dancing wildly and with abandonment. I mean I really do. Amen.

**Mary Lou blesses herself and stands up. Louis and Margaret peek their heads out, enter.**

**LOUIS**

How'd it go?

**The phone rings. Louis gives it to Mary Lou.**

**JANE**

Come to this party and I'm not taking no for an answer.

**MARY LOU**

I'm not feeling up to that, Jane.

**JANE**

You know what your problem is? You are too focused on that stupid pain. If you take your mind off of it, it will go away.

**MARY LOU**

How do you know?

**JANE**

Because that's exactly what happened when I got that huge zit between my eyes. I'll pick you up in half an hour.

**Mary Lou hangs up.**

**MARY LOU**

Maybe I should have a little fun.

**MARGARET**

**(Holding out PPO book.)** May I suggest another physician?

**LOUIS**

**(To Margaret)** That would be fun? **(To Mary Lou)** Frame your mind to mirth and merriment, which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.

**Margaret scowls. Louis stuffs a lumbar pillow in a tote bag and hands it to Mary Lou.**

**LOUIS**

Don't forget Lumbardo. And don't talk about your back nobody wants to hear about your back, boring boring boring.

**He waves her off.**

**COCKTAIL ATMOSPHERE**

**MARY LOU**

Don't talk about my back don't talk about my back don't talk about my back...

**Meeting people**

**MARY LOU (con't)**

Nice to meet you, I have subluxation.  
Hello, I suffer an inflamed sacral iliac joint.  
What do I do? I'm an askew sacrum.

**A guy flirts over to her.**

**FLIRTER**

Disc?

**MARY LOU**

What? Oh, ah, no. Sacrum.

**FLIRTER**

D-O

**MARY LOU**

Excuse me?

**He hands her a card and disappears. Everyone hands her a card.**

**PARTY GUEST #2**

Acupuncture.

**MARY LOU**

What?

**A meandering guest listens in.**

**PARTY GUEST #2**

I go twice a week, get my chi tuned up, I'm brand spanking new.

**MARY LOU**

Those needles don't hurt?

**PARTY GUEST #2**

You don't even feel them!

**MEANDERER**

You need a massage therapist. I go to the guy who does The Bulls. The doctors said that I'd be a back case for the rest of my life, but this guy saved my ass pardon my French --

**FLIRTER**

Hey, back off, the dame is going to an Osteopath.

**He winks at her.**

**MARY LOU**

An osteopath?

**FLIRTER**

It saved me from The Surgery.

**All shudder at the mention of "The Surgery"**

**PARTY GUEST #2**

Yeah, you don't want to have The Surgery.

**A Lingering Partygoer listens in.**

**EVERYONE**

No, no, no.

**PARTY GUEST #2**

I know a guy who lost his bladder function from The Surgery.

**MARY LOU**

Is an osteopath a doctor? Insurance will cover that, right?

**MEANDERER**

Lundt Igor. Massage therapist to the gods.

**The Meanderer and the Partygoer #2 go off in opposite directions. The Flirter rolls his eyes.**

**FLIRTER**

Everybody is an expert. Go see this osteopath, she'll erase your pain, babe.

**The Flirter winks, wanders off. The Lingerer creeps closer.**

**LINGERER**

Reiki.

**MARY LOU**

Excuse me?

**LINGERER**

Reiki.

**A steady flow of partygoers impart advice to Mary Lou.**

**PARTYGOER #3**

You need to be rolfed.

**MARY LOU**

What is that?

**PARTYGOER #3**

It's excruciating! But it'll get you out of that pain.

**PARTYGOER #4**

**(offering card)** Here. Take this. Take it. She's the best reflexologist in the universe. Take it.

**PARTYGOER #5**

Between me and you, you're probably due for some colon hydrotherapy.

**MARY LOU**

What would that have to do with my back?

**PARTYGOER #5**

How can you obtain full health if you've got a dirty colon?

**PARTYGOER #6**

If you believed in God, you wouldn't need to spend a dime on any of these quacks.

**MARY LOU**

I do believe in God.

**PARTYGOER #7**

SHIATSU!

**MARY LOU**

Gazoontite.

**PARTYGOER #8**

Myofacial Trigger Point Therapy. It hits the spot.

**PARTYGOER #9**

Rosen Technique.

**PARTYGOER #10**

Bowen Technique.

**PARTYGOER #11**

Polarity.

**PARTYGOER #12**

Aromatherapy.

**MARY LOU**

For my backache?

**PARTYGOER #13**

Radionics.

**PARTYGOER #14**

Chelation

**PARTYGOER #15**

Cranial Sacral Cranial Sacral Cranial Sacral Cranial  
Cranial Cranial

**PARTYGOER #16**

Feldenkrais Feldenkrais Feldenkraise

**PARTYGOER #17**

When I lost 300 pounds my back pain vanished.



**MARY LOU**

Are you saying I need to lose 300 pounds? I don't think I can.

**PARTYGOER #17**

You can do it, I know you can.

**PARTYGOER #18**

Magnets. Tape 'em all over your body an ther' better 'n aspirins. Just stay away from large refrigeration units.

**PARTYGOER #19**

Bust cream.

**MARY LOU**

Bust cream?

**PARTYGOER #20**

I find hammering a nail into my forehead quickly relieves my lower back problems.

**PARTYGOER #21**

YOU'RE EATING TOO MUCH CHEESE!!!

**PARTYGOER #22**

Yoga.

**MARY LOU**

Yoga?

**PARTYGOER #22**

Yoga.

**MARY LOU**

**(Blows up)** YOGA? I WAS PRACTICING YOGA WHEN I GOT THIS DAMN BACKACHE!!!!

**PARTYGOER #22**

You weren't doing the right kind. You've got to find your prana.

**MARY LOU**

Prana? My prana? I've got to find my -- has anyone seen a prana? I've lost my prana, has anyone seen it? It's about

oh, about this high and it sort of well, it looks a lot like me but it's a prana...

**The party scene dissolves.**

I am amazed me thinks, and lose my way.

**MARGARET**

Not to worry. An educated consumer is the best customer.

**Margaret hands her a manila folder for the cards.**

I labeled it "BACK RECs."

**Busy whirlwind music. A galumph of books fall from the sky.**

**MARY LOU**

Good thing I'm an amateur researchologist, huh?

**Mary Lou opens a book.**

**MARY LOU**

"The History of the Spine"

**(V.O. #1)**

5 trillion years ago -- big bang -- molecules putz in primordial goo -

**(V.O.#2)**

The first consumers -

**(V.O.#1)**

Enter the vertebrates - creatures possessing a segmented spinal column -

**MARY LOU**

Amphibians.

**(V.O.#2)**

Who crawl out of the goo and find lots of delicious consumables, but being tough customers, they demanded wider and wider product selection, and thus evolve into -

**MARY LOU**

The reptile.

**(V.O.#1)**

And then the mammal, and then the first primate swinging tree to tree and then, 4 million years ago *it happens*.

**(V.O.#2)**

For a long time we assumed it happened because males needed to carry spears for hunting, but we now know it's because the female had to lug a kid around in one arm while shopping with the other, and since this is near impossible when you're quadrapedal, she stands herself up, thus freeing her arms for kids and products.

**MARY LOU**

The bipedal hominid.

**(V.O.#1)**

The hindlegger.

**MARY LOU**

Ancestor of Modern Man's supreme inheritance; the ability to walk upright.

**LOUIS**

And it's been a pain in the back every since.

**MARGARET**

The "hindlegger" would not have evolved if she was not ready to do so.

**Mary Lou closes book, starts on another.**

"The History of Medicine."

**LOUIS**

Gadzooks, that's a rather lengthy volume.

**MARY LOU**

**(Reading)** "There was a time in ancient China when patients paid their doctor only if their doctor kept them *well*." I wonder why that fell to the way side.

**She shuts the giant volume. Margaret brings her more books.**

**MARGARET**

Here are 270 books dealing with back pain. Each book has a different philosophy and refutes all the other books, sometimes in a downright nasty fashion.

**MARY LOU**

I am awash in possibilities.

**LOUIS**

The consumer's dream turns nightmare. Have you tried buying *toothpaste* lately --

**MARGARET**

**(Interrupting)** And here are quite a few volumes dealing with that mind-body-spirit hocus-pocus, shall I trash them?

**MARY LOU**

Well no. I believe in the mind-body-spirit thing. You know that Margaret.

**Mary Lou settles in bed with a bunch of books.**

**MARY LOU**

Did you hear that?

**LOUIS**

What?

**MARY LOU**

That noise.

**Margaret and Louis don't hear anything.**

**LOUIS**

Is it your demons?

**MARY LOU**

I thought I heard a murderer. I haven't slept since Donnie left to sink that plane in the Ohio River.

**MARGARET**

But you have a brand new security system with a nice loud alarm.

**MARY LOU**

I know.

**MARGARET**

So what's the problem?

**MARY LOU**

I am afraid that the alarm will go off.

**MARGARET**

Oh, that's silly.

**The alarm goes off**

**MARGARET/LOUIS**

ARGHHHH!

**They dive under the bed. The phone rings.**

**SECURITY OPERATOR (V.O.)**

ADT Security ma'am, the security breach is at 2-A, that would be the door leading out to your humble urban Eden, your rooftop garden.

**MARY LOU**

*Oh my God!*

**SECURITY OPERATOR**

The police are on their way. We here at ADT are currently offering a special on our carbon monoxide detectors, if you'd like, I could send you a brochure -

**MARY LOU**

What?

**SECURITY OPERATOR**

That's right, they come with a 5-year guarantee.

**The doorbell rings**

**MARY LOU**

I have to go - the police are here.

**SECURITY OPERATOR**

All righty ma'am, thank you for choosing ADT Security and you have a pleasant evening.

**A heart beat bump-bumps throughout following scene**

**MARGARET**

Jelly legged she walks through the house -

**LOUIS**

*Past the terrifyingly ajar rooftop garden door -*

**MARGARET**

She makes it down the stairs to the entryway.

**LOUIS**

Her hand on the knob. She opens it.

**MARGARET**

The cops loom big and blue.

**Cop effect - darkness and flashlights**

**MARGARET**

At this exact moment she remembers --

**LOUIS**

Ahhh! She remembers that up on the rooftop --

**MARGARET**

Subtly mixed in with the tall tomato plants are 3 plants - one could call them herbs -

**LOUIS**

*Of an illegal variety.*

**MARGARET**

A modest analgesic experiment.

**LOUIS**

The cops proceed to search the rooftop with their high beamed flashlights.

**MARGARET**

She is on her rooftop at 2 in the morning, flapping her arms in front of the tomato plants and saying to a pair of police officers -

**MARY LOU**

I don't see anyone, I don't see anything. Must be a false alarm. Hehehe.

**LOUIS**

There is a good chance she may urinate down her leg.

**MARGARET**

The police do not see the illegal plants, which is to say they see them but they don't see them. There is no sign of an intruder, and upon investigating the door, they conclude

she hadn't closed it tightly and it blew open in the summer breeze.

**Cop effect and heartbeat subsides.**

After they leave, she shakes for an hour. Then she rips the experiments out of their pots and stuffs them into the bottom of the compost bin. She closes the garden door tightly, and seals it with silver electrical tape.

**LOUIS**

She doesn't put the alarm back on. But watches dawn pink up the sky.

**MARGARET**

She has aged.

**LOUIS**

Boy, I'll say she has. Woowee.

**MARY LOU**

There is a silver lining.  
I haven't thought about my damn lumbar in 6 hours!

**MARGARET**

And so she sets about sleuthing other forms of lumbar distraction.

**MARY LOU**

If I can't rev up my endorphins with exercise, perhaps I can jumpstart them another way. I vaguely recall that the brain perceives spicy food as pain. And so, does it not follow that if I were to eat such food, the brain would send out a fleet of endorphins to combat the heat, i.e. pain? Perchance some would reach down to my affliction.

**MARGARET**

She smothers everything in hot sauce and cayenne and roasts up some jalapenos from the garden.

**LOUIS**

Her nose runs incessantly, but for the duration of the meals she's distracted, all right.

**A strange look passes over ML's face, she leaves the stage.**

**MARGARET**

The problem with eating copious amounts of hot food is that what goes in must come out and to be blunt --

**LOUIS**

She discontinues the heat experiment -

**Mary Lou off stage: ARGHHH!**

**LOUIS**

- when she begins shitting lava.

**Margaret, Louis and Mary Lou sit on the bed watching TV and laughing hysterically.**

**MARGARET**

Laughter. The best medicine.

**The program ends. Margaret and Louis stop laughing. Mary Lou continues trying to laugh until she dissolves into tears.**

**LOUIS**

Oh dear, you simply can't sustain laughter as a pain relieving practice.

**MARY LOU**

I'm gonna be this way forever.

**LOUIS**

Now don't say that -

**MARY LOU**

I'd rather be dead.

**LOUIS**

Oh -

**MARY LOU**

I want my old life back. I miss everything.

**The phone rings, Louis hands it to her.**

**DONNIE**

Hi Pretty Girl.



**MARY LOU**

(still crying) Hi.

**DONNIE**

What's wrong? Your back? What's the matter?

**MARY LOU**

Oh Donnie, I'm such a loser. Here you are, sinking a plane in the Ohio River...

**DONNIE**

Shhhhh...

**MARY LOU**

I finally cancelled my health club membership this morning and it felt like the last nail in my coffin -

**DONNIE**

Ahhh -

**MARY LOU**

That dumb health club has been the only constant in my life for 20 years - through *everything* - I miss my friends and I miss my routine and I miss my locker and I know this sounds stupid -

**DONNIE**

No, no it doesn't -

**MARY LOU**

And what am I going to do? What if my movie falls through and I have to get a secretary job only I can't because I can't *sit* and then I'll have to become a prostitute because I can do *that* on my back and then you'll leave me because who could blame you I'm damaged goods -

**DONNIE**

Do you want me to come home?

**MARY LOU**

No, no, there's nothing you can do, nothing anybody -

**DONNIE**

Because I will, you just say the word.

**MARY LOU**

No. I'm all right, I'm all right, just freaked, frustrated and not a person who copes very well.

**DONNIE**

You're doing a beautiful job.

**MARY LOU**

Oh, I'm okay, I'm okay. I miss you but I'll be okay. I'm fine. How are you?

**DONNIE**

I'm fried.

**MARY LOU**

Yeah, you sound fried.

**DONNIE**

Yeah.

**MARY LOU**

Go to sleep.

**DONNIE**

Yeah, I think I better.

**MARY LOU**

Thank you for listening to my melt down.

**DONNIE**

Good night pretty girl.

**MARY LOU**

And be careful, sinking that plane. Good night. **(Hangs up)**  
God, I'm lucky. I'm so lucky.

**She takes a deep breath.**

**LOUIS**

What distraction shall we try next? A root canal perhaps?

**Margaret gets out the Back Rec folder.**

**MARGARET**

May I suggest we get serious.

**LOUIS**

As distraction?

**MARGARET**

As relief. As cure.

**MARY LOU**

Maybe I should commit to reading some of these mind-body-spirit books. I've been avoiding them.

**LOUIS**

Why?

**MARY LOU**

Because I thought I already had the mind-body-spirit thing down - between yoga and Catholicism and Bill Moyers and all that self help and therapy in the 80s. What if I have to face another horrible hidden truth about myself? I don't think I'm up to it.

**MARGARET**

I concur. Now. There are several rich resources in here. I suggest we peruse more allopathic options.

**LOUIS**

What is that "allopathic?"

**MARGARET**

The isolation of a problem and treatment thereof. Good *scientific* western medicine.

**LOUIS**

Poor Margaret, you do not comprehend that science is just the most recent incarnation of God.

**Before she can respond, Louis grabs a piece out of the folder.**

**LOUIS**

This one looks promising - an Acupuncture Structural Integrationist.

**MARY LOU**

No more Acupuncturists.

**LOUIS**

Oh, don't be sour grapes. That was an unfortunate incident.

**MARY LOU**

It was humiliating beyond words.

**LOUIS**

You're overreacting. This is because you're highly sensitive.

**MARY LOU**

No more acupuncturists.

**LOUIS**

But what are the odds -

**MARY LOU**

No.

**LOUIS**

Not *all* acupuncturists are going to stick you full of needles and leave for the day. That visit to Master Wing was just an unfortunate mishapenstance.

**MARY LOU**

Louis, I wandered his empty halls like a voodoo doll! Leave me to my books, please.

**MARGARET**

A word of caution, my friend. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. **(To Louis)** Francis Bacon.

**MARY LOU**

What are you saying, Margaret?

**MARGARET**

Be wary of ideas free flowing.

**LOUIS**

Oh, listen! This is an integrative mind-body-spirit chiropractic and she's cheap. \$125 a month, unlimited visits. You can read your books on the bus to and fro.

**Ocean soundtrack.**

**MARGARET**

She no longer believes in bone crackers.

**LOUIS**

Shhhhhh. *Network* Chiropractic is an entirely different philosophy. No bone cracking.

**DR. ANNA'S BEIGE STUDIO**

Body lumps lay face in-the-hole on massage tables. Dr. Anna flits between tables, studying spines, and in a quick light swipe she adjusts a spine and moves on. Mary Lou's table is upright so we can see her face through the hole.

**MARGARET**

Oh God, we're not going to do the whole hoobie boobie scene, are we?

Dr. Anna shushes her as she walks by.

**MARY LOU**

**(Whispering)** It's like walking into Zen and being waited on by Jesus.

**LOUIS**

**(Whispering)** Dr. Anna says Mary Lou has a mid-back scoliosis and a hot congestion.

**MARY LOU**

**(Whispering)** It doesn't seem like she's doing much, but after she swipes me, my back unfurls.

**LOUIS**

She's in deep communion with her spine. **(Whispers to Mary Lou)** Is it working?

**MARGARET/MARY LOU/DR. ANNA**

Shhhhhhh.

Dr. Anna flits and swipes.

**MARY LOU (V.O.)**

(Song) Oh, Dr. Sarno - 1<sup>st</sup> verse  
Oh Dr. Sarno,  
I read in your book  
That the pain in my back  
Is really inside of my head.

Dr. Sarno,  
You're telling me  
That my problem is stress  
Caused by modern life, you said

Excessive tension  
Is a dimension  
In our age  
Of anxiety

My pain is simply  
A manifestation  
Of my emotional  
Misery

And I want to believe  
I so want to believe  
You will relieve  
My pain  
Dr. Sarno...

**In bed, she bolts awake. Louis appears.**

**MARY LOU**

I dreamt that I was walking a frantic Dalmatian, she was thrusting so far forward she was walking on her hind legs.

**LOUIS**

A bipedal canine.

**MARY LOU**

And it is all that I can do, to hold onto her leash with my entire self, I am leaning so far backwards -

**LOUIS**

With your lumbar? Not advisable.

**MARY LOU**

People are passing me by but I'm afraid I'll hurl forward out of control. The point where velocity and inertia meet is my lumbar.

**LOUIS**

The pain must exist because you can not or will not keep up with the speed of life around you.

**MARY LOU**

Plausible. Of course it could just be that I was watching  
101 Dalmatians when I feel asleep.

**Back with head in the hole. Dr. Anna flits and swipes.**

Dr. Sarno - 2<sup>nd</sup> verse

Andrew Weil  
While I flipped through your book  
I was hoping to find  
A small miracle

Andrew Weil  
The main theme that the  
Body can heal by itself  
Is quite lyrical

But as I kept reading  
"Spontaneous Healing"  
I was sorta feeling  
Spontaneously bad

The testimonials  
Didn't inspire  
They kind of left me  
Frustrated and mad

Because I want to believe  
I so want to believe  
You will relieve  
My pain, Andrew Weil

**A meditation instructor drifts through bodies in Savasana.**

**CLOYING INSTRUCTOR**

Remember. *You* create your own health. *You* create your own  
pain.  
When you choose to tolerate pain, you can then befriend it.  
Visualize making your pain an intimate companion.  
Your pain presents you with an opportunity.  
Pain helps you grow.  
Seek a mantra that will relax you. A mantra that will  
relax you. A mantra a mantra a mantra...

**MARY LOU**

Fffffffffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck yoooooooooooooooouuuuuuuuuuuu

**Dr. Anna flits and swipes.**

Dr. Sarno - 3<sup>rd</sup> verse

Hey, Louise Hay  
I read in your book  
That the pain in my back  
Is because I'm not loving my self

Louise Hay,  
You're telling me  
That my dis-ease is guilt  
I should purge to obtain perfect health

When we are ill  
Instead of a pill  
We should take  
A look in our hearts

If I am willing  
To release negativity  
My affliction  
Will swiftly depart

(Chant)

I deserve to enjoy life  
I am the power  
The universe supports me  
All is as it should be

And I want to believe  
I so want to believe  
You will relieve  
My pain, Louise Hay

**Mary Lou, head in the hole**

**MARY LOU**

What do you want from me, pain?

**Eyes fly open. Mary Lou jumps off the table and picks up the phone. Donnie appears, hauling long 2X4s over his shoulder. He is grimy and sweaty. He manages to extract his cell phone from his tool pouch.**

**DONNIE**

Yeah?



**MARY LOU**

Hi Donnie, how's Paducah?

**DONNIE**

Mary Lou?

**MARY LOU**

Guess what!?! My body wants to have a baby.

**Donnie is trying to set down his load.**

Hello?

**DONNIE**

Yeah -

**MARY LOU**

Now I know we don't want children, we have cats.

**DONNIE**

What?

**MARY LOU**

We have cats, we don't want a baby.

**DONNIE**

You want to have a baby?

**MARY LOU**

I didn't say **I** wanted to have a baby, only that my body does.

**DONNIE**

What?

**MARY LOU**

I'm of an age, my body was built for procreation, I am not acting on this and so I have pissed it off. It's enraged, Don, the body is enraged. This is the why of my pain.

**DONNIE**

What are you saying, Mary Lou?

**MARY LOU**

What do you mean what am I saying? I'm saying -

**MARGARET**

**(To Louis)** Are you happy now? She's grasping at metaphorical straws.

**MARY LOU**

**(Still on phone)** I have no idea what I'm saying. I'll keep you posted. **(Hangs up.)** I mean I'm not going to breed to appease my lumbar.

**MARGARET**

That does seem like a really wrong reason to have children.

**LOUIS**

This is simply useful as you unravel the mind/body mystery.

**Mary Lou back on the phone.**

**MARY LOU**

Hi Jane, my body wants to have a baby!

**JANE (V.O.)**

I can't talk to you now. I'm eating right for my hair type.

**MARY LOU**

What?

**JANE**

I'm eating right for my hair type and the pounds are flying off, I'm telling you!

**Mary Lou hangs up, dials.**

**MARY LOU**

Hi Julie, my body wants to have a baby!

**JULIE**

Oy, I knew it was only a matter of time.

**MARY LOU**

You did?

**JULIE**

Your cheese has completely slipped off your cracker. Take my advice. Go to a real doctor, he will give you pills.

**Mary Lou hangs up, the phone rings, she answers.**

**GREG**

Greg here. Meet the Parents is in *Mathew Broderick's* hands even as we speak! We're gonna be rich, we're gonna be famous.

**MARY LOU**

My body wants to have a baby.

**GREG**

Really bad timing, Mary Lou.

**MARY LOU**

My biological clock is gonging.

**GREG**

Well unplug it. WE'RE ABOUT TO BE FAMOUS!

**She hangs up.**

**LOUIS**

She wears her theory around like a heavy coat.

**MARGARET**

Until it wears thin.

**MARY LOU**

My body wants to have a baby, my baby wants to have a body.

**LOUIS**

Ah-ha! Freudian slip. The other shoe drops!

**MARY LOU**

My baby wants to have a body?

**LOUIS**

Your inner baby is frustrated and punishes you with pain.

**MARGARET/MARY LOU**

Oh please.

**Back to head in the hole. Dr. Anna flits and swipes.**

**MARY LOU**

Demon, I've visualized you, loved you, cuddled, iced and massaged you. You take advantage of my generosity, mock my efforts, and shoot arrows through my best intentions. You have lodged inside me long enough. I evict you. No, I deploy you.

Dr. Sarno - reprise

I want to believe

I so want to believe

Who will relieve...

Dr. Sarno Louise Hay Andrew Weil?

Dr. SSSSSSSSS

**Screen: The Simpsons**

The "Cape Fear" episode where Sideshow Bob has escaped from prison and is pursuing Bart. Bart sets a trap, he lays a hundred rakes on the ground around Sideshow Bob. These are the short pronged rakes one uses for thatching a lawn. Bart hovers at the periphery, just out of reach. Every time he moves, Sideshow Bob steps on the short prongs of a rake, the pole flies up and smacks him in the face. And then he mutters @#@#@#@#@. Step. Smack. @#@#@#@#@. Step. Smack. @#@#@#@#@. He never catches on. He just keeps running into rakes. Step. Smack. @#@#@#@#@.

Mary Lou ends in a heap on the floor.

**LOUIS**

Now is the winter of her discontent. (To audience)

Intermission.

**End of Act One**