

THE BACKACHE

A traumedy

By Mary Ruth Clarke
WGAE Registered

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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 batologie, Ah rit bou berscription 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 boobie 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 - 1st 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 - 2nd 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 - 3rd 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, coddled, 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