

**STRONG OPINIONS LOOSELY HELD**

By

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## ACT ONE

### SCENE ONE

#### CHARACTERS

HENRIETTA - Single, late 20s. Trying to have it all but keeps looking for love in all the wrong places.

HANK - Mid 60s. Looks like a wealthy coward. Dying.

HANK JR - Early 30s. Used to have a drinking problem but now he just drinks alone. Wears white jeans.

LOIS - Floridian.

#### SETTING

Either South Boston, Massachusetts, or any town in America. The scene takes place in a private hospital room.

*The curtains rise on HANK, sitting upright in his bed and consoling a weeping nurse, LOIS. A gentle knock is heard on the door. The knock gradually shifts into a terse staccato.*

HANK

(Ushering LOIS to stand by the corner)

You may enter.

HENRIETTA

Dad? Oh god, they've already got you hooked on all those machines! (She rushes towards Hank's bedside)

HANK

My son has arrived! Everyone out!  
(Lois lets out an ugly cry and bolts towards the exit, violently bumping shoulders with HENRIETTA on the way out)

HENRIETTA

No, Dad, it's me. Henrietta.

HANK

I don't think so.

HENRIETTA

You're confused. Here, let me turn on the light. (Turns on a lamp) Why is this hospital so dark?

HANK

(offers her a rusty chair)

Oh, Henrietta, it's you! Sit down!

HENRIETTA

(sitting down)

Sure- what? (She jumps up) This chair is covered with rust!

HANK

Henrietta, listen for a second-

HENRIETTA

Why are you even here? You have enough to cover your insurance.

HANK

I let Hank Jr. handle it. Where is my son, by the way?

HENRIETTA

Junior won't be here. He's off the wagon, again. It might have something to do with all that insurance money you keep sending him.

HANK

I suppose that's for the best. No one should have to see their old man like this.

HENRIETTA

No, it's not the best, he's missing. I was actually hoping you've seen him.

HANK

He's missing?

HENRIETTA

It's my mistake. For some reason, I thought people couldn't just check themselves out of rehab.

HANK

I know my son. He'll be fine. Listen, I want to ask you something... while I still can. (he turns from her and looks wistfully at a painting of a farmers market)

HENRIETTA

Alright, but afterward we're going to have to talk about finances.

HANK

Oh, come on.

HENRIETTA

I know you don't like to talk about it (she starts kneeling in front of the bed) but we can't keep putting it-  
Oh what the hell did I just put my knee on? (she rises to her feet and inspects the damage)

HANK

I'm sorry, I had nowhere to put that.

HENRIETTA

This hospital-

HANK

Is a decent, unpretentious medical institution. They might not have any fancy degrees or surgeons, but it's staffed by good people.

HENRIETTA

There's *no* surgeons? Just good people?

HANK

For once Henrietta, trust your father. You don't have to fix everything this time.

HENRIETTA

Someone has to look out for the interests of this family.

HANK

The only *interest* I have happens to work at this very hospital. You've actually met her already.

HENRIETTA

I don't follow.

HANK

The nurse. Doesn't she remind you of Christine?

HENRIETTA

Mom?

HANK

I know that's a hell of a question to ask, it's just... I'm dating again. (He breaks into a wide smile) I know, right!

HENRIETTA

But Dad, you're dying.

HANK

You don't think I know that? (he motions for her to lean in) This stays between family... but as far as she knows, I'm just here for a routine checkup.

HENRIETTA

But you've been here for weeks.

HANK

I suppose for people like you, there's never a time or place for true love.

HENRIETTA

Great, another lesson. I don't need to hear this. Let's just talk about something else.

HANK

(frustrated)

You wanted to talk about finances. Well, I've added her to the will.

HENRIETTA

The will? She's a stranger!

HANK

Lois said you'd react like this. I shouldn't have even told you about us.

HENRIETTA

You've talked about this with her? Do I need to tell you how this looks? She's obviously-

HANK

She's obviously what?

HENRIETTA

You want me to say it? You're so lonely that you don't see, or maybe you don't care, that this nurse is taking advantage of you to get to the family fortune. (Hank hangs his head in shame) ... Dad, I'm sorry I snapped like that. Maybe part of this is my fault. I should've visited more after mom-

HANK

(scoffs)

This is fun for you, isn't it?

HENRIETTA

What? How could this be fun?

HANK

(putting on a shrill voice)

I'm Henrietta!

HENRIETTA

What are you doing?

HANK

(doing a little dance to go with the voice)

I hate my dying father so much that when I finally visit him, I'm going to spend the whole time talking about money and spitting on his last chance for love!

HANK JR

(Hank Jr. bursts into the room. He's holding a pair of balloons and an overloaded gift bag)  
Henrietta, you heartless bitch! How dare you speak to our father like that!

HANK

Junior! (Hank leans over and shouts down the hall) Hey everyone, my son is here!

HENRIETTA

Junior? What are you doing here? What happened at the resort?

HANK JR

There was never a resort and you knew it! You know how hard it was to convince those people I don't have a drinking problem!

HENRIETTA

And they believed you?

HANK JR

No, that's exactly what all the other alcoholics were saying!

HANK

Let's not fight.

HENRIETTA

I'm sorry for lying but you were a mess.

HANK JR

You're still lying! You just wanted me out of the picture so you could weasel into my share of the inheritance.

HENRIETTA

This is ridiculous! All I ever try to do is support this family.

HANK

You? Support? Tell your brother what you said about my Lois!

HANK JR

What's a Lois?

HENRIETTA

I have nothing to say to either of you.

LOIS

(bursting into the room)  
I do. (she rushes forward to Hank's bedside, violently bumping into Henrietta's shoulder along the way)

HENRIETTA

This is a private room!

HANK

She doesn't approve of us. (this time, it's Lois who is consoling Hank)

HANK JR

(scanning the room)

Where can I charge my phone in this... dungeon.

LOIS

There's an outlet here, let me just unplug this. (she reaches towards a plugin the corner)

HENRIETTA

That's the life support! (Lois pulls her hand back and hugs Hank)

HANK JR

Who is this?

HENRIETTA

Dad's girlfriend. She's on the will.

HANK JR

Dad's dating? What about Mom?

HANK

Your mother's been gone-

HANK JR

Wait, what was that about the will?

LOIS

(hissing)

Look at you! Thieves like us ought to stick together!

HANK JR

What? Dad, who is this woman?

HANK

(Gestures to the rusty chair)

Son, why don't you sit down for this.

HENRIETTA

Don't- (Hank Jr maintains eye contact with her as he seats himself.)

HANK

(Hugging Lois with his free arm)

This is Lois. She is my courage. Putting aside that odd comment she just made, she's been nothing but good to me since I've got here, and I think she ought to be rewarded.





HENRIETTA

(Turning to Lois) Shouldn't you do something?

LOIS

( Sobbing and grabbing  
Hanks collar )

Hank! Listen to my voice! I can't make it alone anymore!

HANK JR

Shit! We need another nurse!

HANK

Forget it...

HANK JR

Dad?

HANK

(Weakly trying to push Lois off of him)

Christina, I'm coming to you... I don't know this woman...

LOIS

(Gripping him even harder)

He doesn't know what he's saying... he's already gone, oh poor Hank

HANK

My children... let me speak to my...

HANK JR

I'm here.

HENRIETTA

We're all here.

CURTAIN.