

MORRIE. Hey! Where are you goin'? (*Morrie freezes. Mitch turns to us.*)

MITCH. Spring, 1979. A hot, sticky Sunday afternoon in Waltham, Massachusetts. I am wearing a blue gown and a mortarboard and have just been graduated from Brandeis University.

MORRIE. (*Unfreezes.*) You thought you'd get outta here without a goodbye?

MITCH. (*To us.*) Morrie is my sociology professor. My favorite professor. In my four years at college, I have taken every class he taught.

MORRIE. (*To us.*) This is true. I remember: He was younger than the rest of my students.

MITCH. (*To us.*) But I compensated.

MORRIE. (*To us.*) He'd wear these old gray sweatshirts —

MITCH. (*Nods.*) Yeah —

MORRIE. — and drove this beat-up Mercury Cougar around campus, with the windows down and the music up.

MITCH. (*Nods.*) Yeah, yeah.

MORRIE. (*Smiles, mocking him.*) "Yeah, yeah." And what else did you do? Come on, tell us.

MITCH. (*To us.*) I walked around everywhere with a ... cigarette in my mouth.

MORRIE. (*To us.*) Unlit. He doesn't smoke. Such a tough guy.

MITCH. (*To us.*) The truth is, I almost never got to know Morrie. That first day, I come into class ... (*Light change. Morrie repositions himself.*) It's an intro course. I planned on hiding in the back-ground. (*Beat.*) There are only nine students in the room. Way too intimate. If I cut class, they'll know I'm not there.

MORRIE. You! With the gray sweatshirt and the three-month-old cigarette in your mouth. Where are you going?

MITCH. To the Registrar's Office.

MORRIE. (*To us.*) He was going to drop the class.

MITCH. (*To us.*) I was.

MORRIE. Albom, Mitchell. Is that you?

MITCH. Yeah? (*Mocking propriety.*) "Here."

MORRIE. (*Arm around Mitch.*) I have a question for you. Do you prefer — Mitch or Mitchell?

MITCH. (*Still trying to be Mr. Cool.*) "Uh ... Mitch ... is what my friends call me."

MORRIE. Mitch it is, then. And, Mitch? I hope one day you'll think of *me* as your friend.

MITCH. (*To us.*) So there was, like, no chance of dropping the

course.

MORRIE. Nope.

MITCH. After that first class, I enrolled in another and another.

MORRIE. And another. He practically lived in my office. He'd hang around for lunch, dinner —

MITCH. It's an unbelievable thing to watch Morrie eat. It's not that he lacks manners; it's just that he likes to talk while he's eating ...

MORRIE. I get so excited about what I'm talking about ...

MITCH. You forget to CHEW. Unfortunately, he likes eating egg salad. I'd sit across from him and have to dodge these little yellow projectiles. All the time I know him I have two overwhelming urges: to hug him and to give him a napkin.

MORRIE. Hug me!

MITCH. To everybody else* he's "Professor Schwartz." Me, I call him "Coach."

MORRIE. (*To us.*) I loved that. Everyone should have a coach.

MITCH. (*To us.*) At Brandeis, Morrie was a bit of a campus celebrity. He taught all the big radicals, Jerry Rubin, Angela Davis —

MORRIE. First they'd take my class, *then* they'd get radical.

MITCH. During Vietnam, the word came down from the administration that any student who wasn't passing with at least a "C" average could lose his deferment and be drafted. So Morrie calls a meeting and makes a proposal.

MORRIE. "Give 'em all A's!"

MITCH. So I wind up majoring in sociology. Actually, what I major in is Morrie.

MORRIE. (*To us.*) Mitch has a good brain. *Shana cup*. He was very good at writing, very good at sports. But where I think his heart was ... was in his music. I remember one day, I came down into the basement of the music department, and I saw him inside one of those little cubicles, the kind with the egg cartons on the walls? (*Mitch plays a tune akin to "All the Things You Are."**) I knock on the door. (*He knocks — banging sound heard.*) — Mitch! Mitch!

MITCH. (*Stopping, annoyed.*) What! (*Sees it's Morrie.*) Oh — hey, Coach.

MORRIE. (*Clapping.*) Wonderful! Wonderful! Such a gift.

MITCH. Yeah, yeah.

MORRIE. Yeah, yeah.

MITCH. Whatcha got there?

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

End

MORRIE. Some books you'll need for fall semester.

MITCH. *Identity: Youth and Crisis, I and Thou, The Divided Self.*

MORRIE. A man who plays jazz should know about angst.

MITCH. Oh, I know angst.

MORRIE. (*Challenging.*) What are you talking about? "You know angst."

MITCH. My parents and I were on the phone three hours last night about my "interest in music." They ... never mind ...

MORRIE. Come on. You can tell me. I won't give advice.

MITCH. They want me to be a lawyer.

MORRIE. Don't do it!

MITCH. I thought you said you weren't going to give advice!

MORRIE. Lawyers are the exception!

MITCH. Well, they prefer lawyers to starving musicians.

MORRIE. If your parents didn't want you to go into music, why'd they get you started in it?

MITCH. They didn't. My uncle did. My uncle Mike. At least he doesn't want me to be a lawyer. He *likes* music. He taught me the piano. Taught me football. Taught me how to drive. I was born on his birthday, so my parents let him name me. If I ever DO grow up, he's the person I'd like to be.

MORRIE. Look, your uncle may be your mentor, but your parents are your parents. So here's what you do: When you talk to them, be polite, be respectful, listen to their good advice ... and then PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! (*Morrie pats Mitch on the back. Mitch smiles and goes back to tinkling a tune akin to "Body and Soul."** Morrie watches, then turns to us.) It is hard to find your way in life. The accidental journeys, the unexpected questions. We can't always do it alone. We need teachers. (*Tenderly.*) *I and Thou.* (*Mitch stops playing. Light change. We're back at graduation. Mitch stands and comes to Morrie with a briefcase.*)

MITCH. (*After a beat, to Morrie.*) Coach, I ... I got you a present. It's a briefcase. (*Points out.*) "M.S." Your initials.

MORRIE. I got that. (*Tears up.*) Mitch, you are one of the good ones.

MITCH. Yeah, yeah.

MORRIE. "Yeah, yeah." I want to tell you something. "*Farhaltisht deine licht unter a shorten.*"

MITCH. Morrie, I don't speak Yiddish.

MORRIE. You're a good student. Look it up.

MITCH. Coach ... Look ... I ...

MORRIE. You gotta go.

MITCH. I gotta go.

MORRIE. "You gotta go, you gotta go."

MITCH. I don't know how to say goodbye.

MORRIE. This is how we say goodbye. (*Morrie hugs Mitch. Mitch pulls away.*) Uh-uhh. Extra credit. (*Mitch smiles and kisses Morrie's forehead.*) You'll stay in touch, right?

MITCH. Of course.

MORRIE. Promise me.

MITCH. I promise.

MORRIE. Say it in a sentence.

MITCH. Wha — ?

MORRIE. Say: "Morrie, I promise to stay in touch."

MITCH. "Morrie, I promise to stay in touch."

MORRIE. (*Satisfied, turns, walks, then ...*) Say it again, so you won't forget.

MITCH. "*Morrie, I PROMISE to stay in touch!*" (*Morrie exits. Mitch turns to us.*) I didn't. I proceeded to break that promise every day, every week, and every month for sixteen years. What happened? *Life* happened. After college, I moved to New York. Into an apartment building where my Uncle Mike and his family lived. And I started my career as a jazz pianist. (*Mitch sits at piano, plays jazz in a charming, lyrical way.*) I wasn't an instant star, but I was young, plenty of time, knock on doors, play some piano bars, come home and tell Mike about my adventures. "Don't give up!" he said, "You'll make it!" We'd play duets together. It was a fun time ... (*Stops playing.*) Then Mike got sick. Pancreatic cancer. Very painful. No cure. Mike was young. He had a family. He was bitter. He couldn't handle it. And I couldn't handle it either. I tried not to look when he doubled over or threw-up from the chemo. He was my hero; I didn't want to see him sick and weak! So I'd leave the room and sit at the piano ... by myself. (*Mitch plays a tune akin to "Fascinating Rhythm," now slightly too fast.**) And when he was in pain, which was all the time, he'd cry out. I didn't know what to do, so I just sat there and played. I just kept playing. (*Mitch plays even faster now.*) And as the cancer spread into his stomach and his bones and his skin turned yellow and his hair fell out, he'd cry out louder, and I'd play louder, and his family

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Side B

couldn't help, and the doctors couldn't help, and I couldn't help! *(Mitch plays crazy fast now, discordant, making mistakes. Then he suddenly stops and slams down the piano. Mitch stands.)* I stopped playing music. *(Piano strikes upstage.)* Mike was dead. He was forty-two. I was twenty-one. Half his age. I thought ... "I've got twenty-one years left!" It was time to get "serious." *(Mitch puts on a dress coat and tie.)* I sold my keyboard. I went back to school. Columbia this time. Master's Degree. Journalism. Got a job as a sports reporter. I worked hard. I hustled. And things caught on. And then they more than caught on. I was going to the Super Bowl, the World Series, the Olympics. I got a column, and a bigger paycheck, and a radio gig, and a TV gig, and a new house and an even bigger paycheck — ! And one day I woke up and said: "*This was meant to be!*" I was hatched out of the egg, just like this. Whenever I got music magazines, mail from Brandeis, I threw it away. The past was the past; forget it. And so I forgot my teacher. I might never have spoken, or seen, or heard from Morrie Schwartz ever again had I not been surfing TV late one night when something caught my ear. *(We hear a snippet of Nightline theme.)* MITCH/TED KOPPEL. "Good evening, I'm Ted Koppel, and this ... is *Nightline*. Just who is Morrie Schwartz, and why, by the end of the night, are so many of you going to care ... about him?" *(A light upstage on Morrie.)* MORRIE. *(To us.)* It started with little things. Long walks would leave me out of breath. Exhausted. Then I began to stumble — for no reason. One night, on the dance floor, I fell. And I never fall when I'm dancing. So ... I had tests. Lots of tests. And finally my wife Charlotte and I went to see this neurologist. The doctor says: MITCH/DOCTOR. Mister Schwartz, please sit down. MORRIE. Good news they let you stand. Bad news ... MITCH/DOCTOR. "Mr. Schwartz, you have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS, a degenerative disease of the nervous system — also known as Lou Gehrig's disease." MORRIE. "Lou Gehrig's disease. But that's fatal." MITCH/DOCTOR. "Yes, it is." MORRIE. "I mean — it *used* to be fatal. There's a cure now, right?" MITCH/DOCTOR. "No. There isn't." MORRIE. "Well ... how many years do I have?" MITCH/DOCTOR. "It's not a matter of years." MORRIE. Charlotte and I went outside. It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, the sky was blue, children were laughing, singing. *I wanted it all to stop!* I screamed, "Make the sun die, make

the sky black! No more laughter, no more singing! I'm sick, I'm gonna die!" But the sun stayed up there. The kids kept laughing. The world did not change, because the world doesn't cater to me. So I asked myself, "Am I going to withdraw from the world, like many people do, or am I going to live?" I decided I'm going to live, for as long as I have left. *(Nightline theme. Lights change. Mitch takes a cell phone from his pocket. Sound: phone ring. Morrie answers his phone. On phone.)* Hello? MITCH. *(On phone.)* Uh ... Professor Schwartz? MORRIE. *(On phone.)* ... Yes? MITCH. *(On phone.)* I don't know if you'll remember me ... My name is Mitchell Albom...? I was a student of yours at Brandeis...? In the seventies...? MORRIE. *(On phone, like he's unsure.)* Mitchell Albom ... MITCH. Yeah ... I was a sociology major ... MORRIE. *(He grins.)* Why didn't you call me "Coach"? *(Lights change.)* MITCH. The next Tuesday, I'm on a plane to Boston. I rent a car. I'm driving to Morrie's house. *(Sound of car radio: WINS news time sound. To us:)* The radio's on. All-news station. I'm trying to see the numbers on the mailboxes. Cup of coffee in one hand, a cell phone between my ear and shoulder. *(Into phone.)* "Listen, don't worry! I did my column last night, I recorded my radio gig this morning, my return flight is in two hours, I'll be back in time for the TV spot at eleven. When have I ever missed a gig? I'm doing a good deed today. Yes, occasionally, I do good deeds ... It's a quick sick call; get in, do what I gotta do, and get out!" *(Morrie appears upstage with a walker. Radio cuts off. Light change. Mitch looks up and speaks to us.)* I look up, and I glimpse a figure, a small old man under a Japanese maple. I know deep down I should drop the phone, run to Morrie, give him a hug. But I don't, I got work to finish. So I slide off the seat, like I'm looking for something. *(Into phone.)* "No, no listen — " MORRIE. *(A quizzical rasp.)* Mitch? *(Mitch swivels to Morrie, hiding the phone.)* What are you doing on the floor? MITCH. *(Blindsided.)* Oh. I was ... I was looking for my car keys. MORRIE. Your car's running. MITCH. ... My other car keys. MORRIE. How many cars you got? MITCH. *(Blathers.)* Well, this is a rental — MORRIE. *(Happy, still hugging.)* I'm teasing you. Let's go inside ... Mitchell Albom. My old friend has come back. *(Lights change.)*

Mitch
Begin

They are now in the house. A chair. A table. A white pitcher. A phone.
Tempting:) You'll stay for lunch, right?
 MITCH. Er, well, I don't have a lotta time —
 MORRIE. You have to eat. You and me, we always eat. Besides, we're very healthy here. Eggplant, hummus, tabouli, it's like we live at the co-op. You want ice tea?
 MITCH. Ice tea's good. This it here? *(Reaches for pitcher.)*
 MORRIE. That's my urine beaker. *(Smiles.)* You wanna hold it for me? Help an old man out?
 MITCH. Uhh —
 MORRIE. It's OK. I have helpers. There's a woman here now, Connie, Italian, she's terrific. They're all terrific. I have someone who massages my muscles so they don't seize up, and extends my joints so they don't crunch down. Not to mention the help I'll need when this thing really kicks in ... I dread that.
 MITCH. I can imagine.
 MORRIE. *(Skeptical.)* Can you? You know what the worst indignity about all this is?
 MITCH. What?
 MORRIE. Pretty soon somebody's gonna have to wipe my ass. *(Mitch's cell phone rings.)* What's that? Did we set off the smoke alarm — ?
 MITCH. *(Takes out cell phone.)* Uh, actually, lemme just take this quick. *(Into phone.)* ... Yeah? ... No, I didn't cut you off, I dropped my keys ... I dropped — Skip it. No, no-no — Keep the interview scheduled for eleven. ... No, don't give it to Sagel. I'll be there, I promise! *(Clicks off.)* Sorry.
 MORRIE. Don't be. My phone rings all the time now. I'm getting a lot of calls since the show.
 MITCH. *Nightline* ... Yeah, that was something! I mean, there I am flipping channels, and all of a sudden — *(Nightline theme.)* — BAHM-BAHM-BA-BAAAHM! I didn't know you were ... that you ... You did great on the show. How, uh, how'd that happen?
 MORRIE. I'll tell you. This thing I have had been coming on a long time. ALS.
 MITCH. "Lou Gehrig's Disease."
 MORRIE. Yeah.
 MITCH. Remember the line?
 MORRIE. What line?
 MITCH. From the movie. Gary Cooper is Lou Gehrig, and he's got "Lou Gehrig's Disease," and he goes in front of Yankee Stadium,

and he says over the loudspeaker: "Today *day* ... I consider myself *self* ... the luckiest man *man* ... on the face of the earth."
 MORRIE. Yeah, well, I didn't say that. Anyway, this ALS works fast. I had to stop swimming, stop driving, stop teaching. That hurt. You know me. I have to teach, or what am I here for? So I started observing my own decay, and I began to jot down ideas, aphorisms. A friend sent them to a reporter, and next thing I know, I get a phone call from Fred.
 MITCH. Fred?
 MORRIE. I'm always calling him "Fred." Ted! Ted Koppel! He came to the house, asks me what I thought about his show. I said, "I've only seen it twice." "Twice?" he says. "Don't feel bad, I said I've only seen *Oprah* once!"
 MITCH. So what *did* you think of his show the two times you saw it?
 MORRIE. I thought he was a narcissist.
 MITCH. Good thing you didn't tell him *that*.
 MORRIE. I did! I told him he acts like he knows the answers to all the questions BEFORE he asks them. I said, "Look, you don't know anything about dying; I do. If you're going to interview me, you better be prepared to LEARN something." Also, he has very serious hair. Anyway, we did the show, and already some good has come out of it.
 MITCH. Because you're famous.
 MORRIE. Because you came back.
 MITCH. Yeah, hey, Morrie, I'm sorry I never ... I mean, I've lost touch with almost everyone from college: beer-drinking buddies, the first woman I ever woke up with in the morning ...
 MORRIE. *(Deadpan.)* That was in college, huh?
 MITCH. Well, yea —
 MORRIE. *(Smiles, amused.)* Uh-huh. So, we'll catch up. Sit down. What have you been up to for sixteen years? Start at graduation.
 MITCH. Well, when I left Boston, I was gonna be a jazz musician.
 MORRIE. I loved that! A jazz musician
 MITCH. Yeah, well, I'm not a jazz musician.
 MORRIE. Oh. So ... what are you?
 MITCH. I'm a journalist.
 MORRIE. What do you cover, education? Science?
 MITCH. No.
 MORRIE. International affairs?
 MITCH. Does soccer count? No, I'm ... I'm a sports reporter. A

columnist, actually. I also write books, do some radio, TV.

MORRIE. Ever been on *Nightline*?

MITCH. ... No.

MORRIE. (*Smiles, sighs.*) Ah, well.

MITCH. I live in Detroit. (*Beat.*) Michigan (*Beat.*) The Motor City. Ever been there?

MORRIE. I don't think so.

MITCH. Well I've been there a long time now. You'll be happy to know I'm more efficient than I was in college.

MORRIE. Why will that make me happy?

MITCH. Well, I mean, you know how kids in college slough off.

MORRIE. When else are they gonna slough off? When they're airline pilots? Brain surgeons? Slough when you can, as long as you can! Enjoy it!

MITCH. Well, sometimes it's hard to enjoy it. Life, I mean. Work, mortgage, "The Pace of the City, the House in the Suburbs."

MORRIE. (*Taking Mitch back to their past.*) You still drive that Mercury Cougar?

MITCH. (*Dumfounded; then smiles.*) ... No, I don't have the Cougar. I do have cars though.

MORRIE. I know. You have car keys. So. A house, the suburbs, various cars. Have you found someone to share this life with?

MITCH. Share...? Oh! Yes! I have! A very nice woman.

MORRIE. (*After a beat.*) ... Have you named her?

MITCH. (*Red-faced, quickly.*) Yes! Janine! She's a singer.

MORRIE. Janine.

MITCH. Yeah, she's great. We're getting married next month. We've been dating seven years.

MORRIE. Mr. Impulsive.

MITCH. Well, it's finding the time ... there's the hockey playoffs, the basketball playoffs. Then I'm into all these outlets, TV, radio, print. So you have to hustle to make sure you're on top —

MORRIE. Mitch. Can I ask you a question?

MITCH. Shoot.

MORRIE. Are you at peace with yourself?

MITCH. ... What is this, a ... a ... (*At a loss.*) ...?

MORRIE. I'll ask again. Are you at peace with yourself? Are you trying to be as human as you can be?

MITCH. (*Grappling with the question.*) Well, you know ... um ...

MORRIE. Mitch, why are you here?

MITCH. (*Taken aback.*) Well, I saw you on the show ...

MORRIE. You want to know what it's like to die?

MITCH. (*Agitated and scared.*) No! No, I'm not some ghoul — !

MORRIE. (*Very calm.*) That's why most people come. I'm not quite alive, I'm not quite dead, I'm "in-between." I'm about to take that last journey into the great unknown. People want to know what to pack. You know *how* I'm going to die?

MITCH. (*Intrigued in spite of himself.*) ... How?

MORRIE. I'll suffocate. You see, with healthy people, the brain sends a signal to the muscle. The brain says move foot, and it moves. But with ALS, the signal never gets through, so the muscles don't get used. They wither and die. The feet. The legs. The arms, the hands. The body kills itself. Me, I've had asthma for years. So, when the disease hits my lungs ... well, here's a test. (*Inhales.*) One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten-eleven-twelve-thirteen-fourteen-fifteen-sixteen-seventeen-eighteen — (*Gasps.*)

MITCH. Morrie, do you need the — what's-her-name...?

MORRIE. (*Cough subsides.*) No, no! Gimme a minute! Wheeww. When the doctor first asked me to do this, I could reach thirty-three. Now it's eighteen. My tank's almost empty (*Closes eyes.*)

MITCH. ... Coach?

MORRIE. (*Opens eyes.*) That's me. I'm still your coach.

MITCH. I better get going. My flight, I have to get the car back to the rental place, check in —

MORRIE. You gotta go, you gotta go ... Extra credit?

MITCH. (*Doesn't recall.*) ... What?

MORRIE. Never mind.

MITCH. Take care, Morrie.

MORRIE. Mitch. Dying is only one thing to be sad over. Living unhappily is something else. (*Lights change as Morrie uses his walker to walk off upstage. Mitch lets out a big sigh, shaking off the experience and glad to have this visit over.*)

MITCH. (*To us.*) And that was *it!* A one-shot deal. Old professor, used to be close, pay my respects before he dies. *I did my duty.* In the weeks that followed, I was on the road a lot, covering basketball, baseball, the Derby ... and I got married. Small ceremony down in the islands. A quick honeymoon, I promised Janine a longer one, and then I was back at work. I was in London covering Wimbledon. And I remembered thinking that the only sport Morrie ever liked was tennis. (*The sound of tennis balls "pocking" back and forth with a stately rhythm. As Mitch speaks, the "pocks" get faster and faster.*) He liked the gentility of the game. That wasn't the

Side C

chair. But this room is so changed now. It has filled up with such love and warmth and honesty and tears. This is a wealthy home.

MITCH. Yes. It is. *(Mitch's cell phone rings.)* 'Scuse me. Probably someone offering me some money. *(Into phone.)* Yeah? No, I told you, I can't do the interview Tuesday, Tuesday is out, I can do it Wednesday! ... Tuesday's the only day he's available? He's a diver! How busy can he BE? ... All right ... Fine! ... Yeah ... FINE. Give it to Sagel. *(Clicks off.)*

MORRIE. What's the matter?

MITCH. *(Shakes head "nothing.")* Interview I was supposed to do.

MORRIE. Was it an important interview?

MITCH. Sort of, but —

MORRIE. It was on Tuesday.

MITCH. No big deal. They're gonna give it to this other writer, second stringer.

MORRIE. You're angry.

MITCH. No, I'm not! *(Beat.)* OK, I am.

MORRIE. Why do you think that is?

MITCH. Should I lie down on the couch *now*? It's just that I'm the guy who always says yes. It's how I got to where I am.

MORRIE. And you have to keep doing this, saying yes?

MITCH. If I don't say "yes," they might stop asking. This guy they're sending in is a comer, he's smart, he's sharp, and he's like ten years younger than me. Even the athletes I cover are ten years younger now. More! Every season, there's this new crop of them, aliens emerging from their pods, eternally young!

MORRIE. Just like college.

MITCH. What?

MORRIE. You used to be the youngest person in the room.

MITCH. Not anymore. There is nothing sadder in this world than a wrinkled, old sportswriter begging a naked nineteen-year-old to answer a question.

MORRIE. Why is he naked?

MITCH. ... Skip it. Morrie, the world today is for the young.

MORRIE. Ach! I teach young people, I know how miserable they are! Their grades, their parents, their love affairs. They see every setback as the end of the world. All this emphasis on youth! Don't buy it.

MITCH. Then why do people say, "I wish I was twenty again," not "I wish I was sixty-five"?

MORRIE. Aging is not just decay, you know. As you age, you

grow. As you grow, you learn. A tree's leaves are most colorful just before they die. If you're always battling against getting old, you're always gonna be unhappy because you're gonna get old anyway.

MITCH. Are you telling me you don't envy youth?

MORRIE. No, I don't.

MITCH. You don't envy *my* youth?

MORRIE. Mitch. Age is not a competition. Inside I'm every age I've ever been. I can be a child when it's appropriate to be a child. And I can be a wise old man when it's appropriate to be a wise old man. Why should I envy where you are? I've already *been* where you are. You should envy me! I got forty years on you! ... *(Reflective.)* ... You know, at my seventieth birthday party, my friends said, "Morrie you're getting old" ... *(Smiles.)* I took it as a compliment. *(Lights change.)*

MITCH. *(To us.)* And so the summer goes. My collection of tapes is getting taller, my visits are growing longer, and my list of questions is getting shorter. *(Morrie tries to pour water from pitcher. Bumps glass, both pitcher and glass fall to the floor. He reaches for the bell, but can't grab it. He slumps off the side of the arm rest.)*

MORRIE. Connie...? *(Lights change. Mitch enters with bag. He doesn't see the mess.)*

MITCH. *(Entering.)* Sorry I'm late! First thing you gotta know, it's the hottest Tuesday of the summer! This is official!

MORRIE. Mitch —

MITCH. ... Air conditioning was out at the airport! Everybody wants to kill each other! It was like getting out of Saigon — *(Exits, offstage.)* My plane out was delayed on the ground, but of course they don't tell you that until you're on the plane and there's nowhere to go but sit on the runway where I'm trapped between the two largest, most perspiring people in America. Then the traffic is a nightmare. So, now I've got like five minutes, so ... *(Entering, sees the mess.)* Jesus, Morrie, what happened?

MORRIE. I was playing hockey. *(Mitch sits Morrie up straight. Takes pitcher and glass offstage, reenters with dish towel and a glass of water with a straw. He gives Morrie a drink, then he cleans up spilled water.)* Mitch. I saw one of your TV shows over the weekend.

MITCH. You did? ... So ... what'd you think? Don't say I was a narcissist.

MORRIE. No.

MITCH. Good.

MORRIE. Worse. You were mean-spirited. The things you said

Morrie
Begin



about that basketball fella who missed a practice.

MITCH. Ahhh —

MORRIE. Mitch, words hurt ...

MITCH. ... Sticks, stones, you couldn't hurt these guys with a baseball bat ... It's TV, Morrie! It's a SHOW! You didn't like Ted Koppel either, remember?

MORRIE. I never taught Ted.

MITCH. Morrie, no offense, but that guy I hurt so much will make this year alone more than you've earned in your lifetime, and he can't even get to practice?!

MORRIE. Maybe it was a one-time thing.

MITCH. Oh, come on!

MORRIE. What if he forgot?

MITCH. (*Snaps, angry.*) Yeah, and what if I flap my wings and — ? Morrie, you do not forget! I don't forget! I — (*Stops.*) ... Coach ... it's a different world out there than in this room.

MORRIE. But you're the same person wherever you go. (*Smiles.*) ... OK? Let's get to work.

MITCH. OK. (*Starts to set up the taping.*)

MORRIE. Did you know my sons were in this weekend?

MITCH. Really?

MORRIE. We cried three days straight. It was great!

MITCH. (*Attaching the microphone.*) Sounds terrific. Gee, why'd they go?

MORRIE. That feels good.

MITCH. The microphone? ...

MITCH and MORRIE. "The touching and the feeling."

MORRIE. Are we set up? Are we ready? I have a subject.

MITCH. Go!

MORRIE. You know when young people visit, the question I get asked most is, "Morrie, should we have children?" Now, as you know, I never give advice —

MITCH. (*A slight roll of the eyes.*) Uh-huh.

MORRIE. But...?

MITCH. But what?

MORRIE. ... Well ... are you and Janine going to have a family?

MITCH. What are you, my mother? I see all the plus things about kids. But I worry about feeling tied down. I mean, you give up a lot of things to be a parent.

MORRIE. Yes, but what you get back ... There is no experience like having children. Let me tell you why my sons are so special.

Charlotte and I couldn't have kids. We tried, but ... So we decided to adopt, and we were blessed with the most beautiful baby boy in the world. Then, one day, Charlotte feels a little queasy, goes to the doctor: She's pregnant! Nine months later we've got the *other* most beautiful baby boy in the world! You have to go after life and embrace it! And when you do, sometimes life will embrace you back in ways you never imagined! Love! Love is the only rational act. Without love, we are birds with broken wings.

MITCH. What do you say to the person who says ... he envies people who *don't* love.

MORRIE. Who is this person?

MITCH. He's theoretical.

MORRIE. Does he look like you?

MITCH. Morrie!

MORRIE. How can a person envy someone who doesn't love?

MITCH. Maybe the person who *doesn't* love has more freedom than the person who *does*. A person who does *not* love is free to accomplish things, free to experience the world, free of the pain when someone leaves them.

MORRIE. Don't you sports types say, "No pain, no gain"?

MITCH. That's for runners —

MORRIE. We're all running! We're in the human race! (*With meaning.*) Some people are running so fast they don't know where they're going.

MITCH. You can't say that about everyone.

MORRIE. I can say that about someone in this room.

MITCH. (*Turns away, upset.*) But if the point in loving someone is —

MORRIE. There's no "point" in loving; loving *is* the point. Why do you think people say they fall in love? Because falling is helpless.

MITCH. (*Angry now.*) I don't *wanna* be helpless, OK? (*Beat.*) Maybe we should drop this subject.

MORRIE. What did I say?

MITCH. Nothing. I just think we've talked enough about love. You need a break.

MORRIE. (*Stares a beat, then.*) I need a ... OK. (*Mitch busies himself putting the tape recorder away, then ...*)

MITCH. (*Turns to Morrie.*) I'm sorry, Coach ... I said it was theoretical, all right? (*Mitch exits. Lights change.*)

MORRIE.

"And no one exists alone;

End

Side D

Hunger allows no choice
We must love one another or die."

(Lights change.)

MITCH. *(Offstage.)* Good morning! Morrie? Connie? ... I came in the back way because my food bag is leaking. I'm gonna put it in the fridge ... *(Enters, in disbelief.)* I saw the refrigerator. It's filled with my food bags.

MORRIE. *(Caught.)* Oops.

MITCH. You haven't been eating any of it.

MORRIE. *(Caught.)* I haven't been able to chew for months.

MITCH. Why didn't you tell me?

MORRIE. I didn't want to disappoint you. You get such a kick out of bringing it.

MITCH. I only brought it because I thought *you* got a kick out of eating it!

MORRIE. *(Smiles.)* Gee, this is a real O. Henry story, huh? Mitch, I have an announcement to make. I have lost my battle. Someone is now wiping my ass.

MITCH. I'm sorry, Coach.

MORRIE. Yeah, I know you wanted to be here for that.

MITCH. How are you handling it?

MORRIE. I'm not. Connie is. *(Laugh-coughs.)*

MITCH. You sure you wanna stay up? You wanna go back to bed?

MORRIE. Nah ... I have a new aphorism. "When you're in bed, you're dead."

MITCH. A rhyming one, no less.

MORRIE. Helps to remember.

MORRIE. ... So. How is Janine?

MITCH. She's good.

MORRIE. And when am I going to meet her?

MITCH. *(Hedging.)* I don't know. It's hard to coordinate. You know singers, their schedules ...

MORRIE. Always on call in case somebody needs some singing. I have a busy schedule myself, y'know. *Nightline* called the other day.

MITCH. Why?

MORRIE. They want to come by for "one last" installment. Every visit I get from Koppel, I know I'm a little closer to death. He should start wearing a shroud.

MITCH. I don't like them hovering around you like that.

MORRIE. Now, now ... Ted said he'd visit even if I *couldn't* do the interview. He's a good soul! Not everyone on TV is a bad guy.

(Morrie coughs. He chokes. It's bad.)

MITCH. Morrie? Mor — !

MORRIE. URRGGH!

MITCH. Coach, tell me what to do!

MORRIE. *(Through choking and gagging.)* — Hit me!

MITCH. Hit you?

MORRIE. *(Through choking.)* Turn me on ... my side ... and hit me on my back!

MITCH. *(Hitting.)* Like that? Is that too hard?

MORRIE. *(Choking.)* — arder!

MITCH. *(Hitting harder.)* Harder?

MORRIE. *(Nods, red-faced, choking.)* Hmmph!

MITCH. *(Slaps hard.)* Like that? Like that?

MORRIE. Hrrrpm!

MITCH. *(Whacking him.)* There! I'm hitting you hard! Is that too hard?

MORRIE. *(Garbled.)* — ss — !

MITCH. What?

MORRIE. *(Garbled.)* — es!

MITCH. Is it too hard?!

MORRIE. *(Gasps, comes up for air.)* YES!!! *(Morrie stops coughing. He stares out front. We could mistake this for his death. Then he inhales and eases back again. Finally Morrie looks at Mitch.)* I always knew you wanted to hit me.

MITCH. Yeah. Well. That was for that "B" you gave me sophomore year.

MORRIE. Hold my hand? Squeeze.

MITCH. *(Squeezes.)* I am.

MORRIE. *(Trying to be calm.)* Harder.

MITCH. *(To us.)* I look at him sometimes, and I think about the story of Job. Job is a good man, but God makes him suffer, gives him boils, kills his cows, takes away everything he has, his house, his money, his family, his health. All to test his faith. I ask Morrie what he thinks about that. He says:

MORRIE. *(Looks at Mitch.)* I think God overdid it.

MORRIE. You know what I wish?

MITCH. What?

MORRIE. I wish I had a piano.

MITCH. So you could play?

MORRIE. So *you* could. Remember that little room where you used to play in college? I loved to stand outside the door ... and lis-

Mitch
Begin



ten. Such a gift.

MITCH. (*Tenses, shakes head.*) Yeah, well ... I don't play piano anymore.

MORRIE. That's a shame. I remember you said your uncle taught you. Your uncle ... Mike?

MITCH. Yeah, he, uh ... Uh ... He died ... a long time ago. Cancer.

MORRIE. ... I am sorry for that.

MITCH. (*Shrugging it off.*) Mike had two sons. When he was really bad, they'd come down to my apartment, and I'd play for them. Cartoon songs. Theme from the *Flintstones*, you know? Sometimes we'd sit in this La-Z-Boy chair, all three of us. And the two of them fit in there with me, that's how small they were.

MORRIE. How did you handle it? Your uncle's death?

MITCH. I didn't. Night he died my aunt called, she said Mike was bad, he had to go the Emergency Room, could I watch the kids? It was three in the morning. Mike was waiting by the elevator in the hall, he was so pale ... yellow.

MORRIE. What did you say?

MITCH. "See ya soon, don't worry ... " Nothin'. Elevator door closed, and I never saw him again.

MORRIE. You wish you had said something meaningful to him. You wish he had said something meaningful back. You never had your moment.

MITCH. Isn't that what everyone wants when someone they love dies?

MORRIE. Yeah ... but if you wait until the last minute for the famous last words ... well, you better have great timing. The wise and wonderful things you want to say at the end are the kinds of things you should say all your life.

MITCH. That's easy for you. You say the right things every day.

MORRIE. (*Wearily.*) You think so? You remember the first day you taped me, and I said I wished I had been more aware of death every day of my life?

MITCH. Yeah, you were talking about your mother —

MORRIE. There's more. When my mother got sick, she didn't go to the hospital at first, she was at home ... and during the day she'd sit at the window, on the second floor, watching the street. And I'd be outside with my friends, playing stickball ... and she was in pain, she was in such pain ... and when she was bad, she'd call for me, from the window, to get her medicine, and I ... I would pre-

tend I couldn't hear her. I was afraid. I was ashamed! I didn't want to look at death, so I abandoned my mother when she needed me most! I was too young ... And when your uncle died, you were too young, too. We did what we were able to do. (*Lights change.*)

MITCH. (*To us.*) Later that week Ted Koppel and the *Nightline* crew came back for their final visit. Morrie roused himself for his eight million fans. He spoke about love, he spoke about compassion and responsibility. He even spoke about God. When the interview was over, Koppel pulled Morrie aside. He put his arm around him and said, "You done good." Morrie said, "I'm negotiating to see if I get to be one of the angels." At Brandeis, the students were already into the fall semester. For the first time in thirty years, Morrie isn't there to teach them. (*Lights up on Morrie.*)

MORRIE. Mitch? What time is it?

MITCH. Almost seven. Why?

MORRIE. Well ... isn't it almost time for ... The World Series? Well, it's on tonight, isn't it?

MITCH. (*Genuinely startled.*) How did you know that?

MORRIE. Everyone knows the World Series!

MITCH. Oh, yeah? Who's playing?

MORRIE. (*Caught.*) Two baseball teams. OK, Connie told me it was on. Isn't that something you'd usually be at?

MITCH. It's the first one I've missed in fourteen years.

MORRIE. Because you're here.

MITCH. Sagel's covering for our paper.

MORRIE. So ... you wanna watch it with *me*? I may not be Howard Cosell, but ... (*Mitch laughs.*) What?

MITCH. Yes. I wanna watch it with you. (*Sitting down, going for remote.*) It won't be the first time you've interfered with my sports career.

MORRIE. Oh?

MITCH. Remember that basketball player who missed practice? I thought about what you said, so I went out to talk to him. See if he had a good reason why.

MORRIE. And?

MITCH. He didn't. Told you so.

MORRIE. Has he missed since?

MITCH. No.

MORRIE. Told you so.

MITCH. Hey, I better let Janine know I'm getting a later flight. Can I use your phone?

End