



Mary and the Meaning of Life

A play by Albert Fried-Cassorla

Version 4 Nov. 30, 2022

NOTE ON PRODUCTION:

This play includes several minor characters who can either be omitted or worked around. Audience members may be able to play some of these roles. I can work with any producer to resolve this and other challenges!

- Albert Fried-Cassorla, albfc@icloud.com

SETTING:

Outside a home in Melrose Park, a leafy neighborhood north of Philadelphia.

CHARACTERS:

MARY – a woman in her late 60's, widowed, has a son, Benedict, in his 40's. Wears a shawl and has a necklace of blossoms. Her mom, not seen is Elizabeth.

MARY YOUNGER – Mary in her late teens

KARL – Karl in his early 20's, Also playing DEAD KARL – unseen, voice by young Karl actor, using a husky older voice. Also playing ALBERT, the playwright.

UMBERTO / STAGE MANAGER – a man in his late 70's, a neighbor of Mary's who lives a few houses away. He lost his wife, Magda, 10 years ago. He is Italian, as his grandfather was born in Sicily.

PEARL is an actual neighbor in ger 90's and a participant with a few lines. She was in Britain during the blitz and emigrated to the U.S. with her GI husband, Charles. During our planned July 2022

show, she will be played by a volunteer who will read her part. For now, this will be Martha Fried-Cassorla.

ACT I

AT RISE:

(Stage Manager is standing, talking to the audience)

UMBERTO / STAGE MANAGER

Welcome to my neighborhood. Not far from here, just a few blocks south. Perhaps it's a lot like yours. In a suburb of a major American city. *(turns to an audience member)* You *(sir or miss)*, would you say your neighborhood is probably like mine? *(they improvise)* Well, I think anything can happen in my neighborhood, and probably has. Do you agree about yours?

Let's look quickly at a map. Here it is....

Well tonight's story could have happened anywhere, perhaps, because all neighborhoods harbor secrets and remarkable stories. But this story happened right here, where life is very rich.... Some of my neighbors are about to go for a walk. Let's drop in on one them, shall we?

[MARY is leaving her house, humming or whistling a tune. She turns to lock the door. She wears a garland of flowers around her neck. She steps down unseen steps, holding onto an unseen railing. She reaches the bottom, moves forward small, careful steps. She has a slight limp.]

(MARY calls out across the street to a closed door of a nearby house and crosses to stage right.)

MARY

YOO-HOO! UMBERTO! UMBERTO, come out now! *(a beat. She looks up to listen to imagines bird or pre-recorded sounds and admire the trees.)* What a lucky, lucky woman I am to live to see such a lovely day! ... UMBERTO, come out, come out! Emerge from your domicile, I say. Step lively, young fellow.

(MARY apparently sees UMBERTO emerging from across the street. Enter UMBERTO. He walks steadily but with reserve.)

UMBERTO

Hello, Mary, Mary. How sweet to see you. I hope you don't mind my saying it again and again.

MARY

Oh go ahead. It's always music to my ears.

UMBERTO

So, my glorious friend, let me look at you.

MARY *(slightly embarrassed)*

Why, you sly man. You know there's nothing new to see. How can you say that every morning? What's wrong with you?

UMBERTO

You mean what's *right* with me! Indulge me, even if you're slightly uncomfortable with praise. How sweet to see you looking so resplendent. *(he fingers her blossoms lightly,)* And pardon my tardiness this morning. I was falling asleep again, even after a full

eight hours. And you are looking especially lovely in that silk shawl.

MARY

Why thank you. And you are looking quite dapper in that stylish hirt.

UMBERTO

Do you think? Hmm.

Let's go up Cedar today (*points in one direction, probably to his left*). Or do you prefer Ash?

MARY

Cedar is fine. And we'll be "greeting or recalling" all we can, all right?

(they link arms and proceed.)

UMBERTO

Of course. Greet and recall. Did you hear then good news about our neighbors Carolyn and Jim? They're to be grandparents again.

MARY

Again? Why this is their third! Blessing after blessing.

UMBERTO

Our two-block area is filled with them -- between the tragedies, that is.

MARY

Yes, there must be tragedies as well. They add meaning to life.

UMBERTO

Yes, but this is a blessing, my dear. Jim told me they'd be flying out to Cincinnati when the baby is born to be there to help Esther and Jacob. I am so happy that people still want to bring babies into this world!

MARY

Yes, it reassures one. With all that's going on. Me too! Did you hear what the Pope said about that last week?

UMBERTO

The dogs comment?

MARY

Indeed. Too many people caring for dogs and not enough babies being born. "Don't choose pets over people," he said. "It takes some of our humanity away."

UMBERTO

Well... There's a truth for us.... I suppose.

Look, I remember when Jim and Maureen's little Esther was riding her first two-wheeler right there in front of their house. Right there! If I close my eyes, I can see her yelling with the thrill of it all. So much life has passed among us on these streets. Let's visit and listen for a moment.

(SFX: children's laughter is heard)

MARY

It's always so spooky when you do that. But it's wonderful too! Your memory is unbelievable.... Umberto, how long have we been going on these daily walks? It feels like a long long time.

UMBERTO

Five years to the day. This is our anniversary of walking together. If you can call it walking together. It's more like stopping together! *(they laugh)*

MARY

Yes, we never miss a day, walking -- or stopping. *(both smile)* Not since our first. A month after Karl passed. Five years ago.

UMBERTO

Yes, I thought that was a decent interval. Before I invited you, that is...

MARY

Remember how I was inconsolable the month before accepting your invitation. Was I being sinful when I finally said yes?

UMBERTO

No, you were being human. I was lonely too, missing my Magda after all.

MARY

Yes, she was a wonderful woman, so of course you missed her and needed companionship.

UMBERTO

Mary, because this is a special day, five years and all. Don't you think we're remarkable?

MARY

You are. Not so sure about me. I'm just a grey-haired, grey faced widow. There're a million like me.

UMBERTO

Nonsense. I don't want to hear any of that self-belittling chatter from you today.... I thought I would share a secret with you.

(MARY clutches her chest.)

MARY

You're not sick are you?

UMBERTO

Definitely not. *(THEY walk again.)* I am the healthiest seventy-eight year-old for miles around. Well, except for Anthony, that darned incorrigible... er- marathoner.

No, its....

MARY

Well, what's the secret for heaven's sake?

UMBERTO

First, forgive me for asking, but... you know, some parishioners at St. Mary of the Assumption are not exactly full believers. I mean for all our joint attendance, we don't talk doctrine much, do we?

MARY

No, not as such.

UMBERTO

So I have to ask: you believe in our dear lord don't you?

MARY

Of course! See? (*pauses to say hail Maries and finger her rosaries*). I carry my rosaries blessed by the Pope every day!

UMBERTO

And the Lord has the ability to raise the dead and to give hope where there was none, does he not?

MARY

He does. Where are you going with all of this? You're frightening me!

UMBERTO

And he has the power to someday grant eternal salvation to us?

MARY

Yes, if we are good. Where is this conversation going? I thought we were going for a nice, casual walk around the block, as usual.

UMBERTO

Well, not every walk's just like the previous, nor is every day,

MARY

Umberto, cut to the chase. You've got me terribly worried.

UMBERTO

Things've changed, Mary. I can see so much. And I know so much. Too much sometimes.

MARY

Oh? Oh really?? So can you foresee life and death?

(UMBERTO nods and looks into her eyes meaningfully.)

MARY

I can't deny that I've always suspected, I've always suspected you had special powers. But I always thought it was for trivial things, like talking yourself out of a parking ticket. I saw you do that once, you rascal!

UMBERTO

Ha! But I'm serious, Mary. You did have suspicions? Why?

MARY

(They pause again) Your eyes. They're so soulful. Like no one else has. *That's* how I know.

UMBERTO

You know it started with a dream I had before we met. Saint Peter, the custodian of God's church here on Earth, as you know, came to me and said he had special projects for me here on Earth. Monsignor Joseph once told me very specifically that if any saint asked me to do his bidding, that would be a very holy obligation. I was only seven then, just after my first communion. Saint Peter,

in his visitation, asked if I agreed to his giving me those special powers... At first, I said I respectfully did not accept. I was frightened of the responsibility, Mary!

MARY

You refused a saint? Ya know, Saint Peter once said, “Humble yourself, therefore under the mighty hand of God. So that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.”

UMBERTO

Mary, I tell you I was scared!

MARY

Let's take a break here... (*MARY sits.*) But then, who would want to have those powers? Not me, I'd be petrified, like I bet you were.

UMBERTO

So... I can foretell the future... Including yours. Are you interested?

MARY

No! Not me!

UMBERTO

What if that giant sycamore tree over there (points) would fall and injure young Wally Pickerel, five years from now, age 9, although he is just 4 now and lives right there.

MARY

No more! I will faint! And don't you dare injure that darling young boy! Pardon me, Umberto. And forgive me Saint Peter – for I don't want any of your past and future business. None at all! I know what counts. Let's walk now.

(They walk silently for several seconds.)

UMBERTO

Yes, you do, Mary. That's one of the reasons I love you.

[MARY stops abruptly.]

MARY *(stunned)*

You love me?

UMBERTO *(catching himself)*

I love your company that is.

(stops abruptly)

MARY

Oh... How is that so different? *(she is obviously relieved; both start walking again)*

UMBERTO *(ignoring that comment)*

So tell me what counts in your life, as we stroll.

MARY

I'm not sure we're going to stroll much today.... Why so profound? We usually chat about such mundane things... the perfect weather we've been having, my mah jong club, my macrame art... and I watch your eyes glaze over.

UMBERTO

Yes. You do. I admit to not being the most attentive companion – only at times, when I have a lot on my mind.

MARY

And you tell me about your sister's psoriasis...

UMBERTO

Yes. I do.

MARY

And about the high price of kohlrabi and celeriac.

UMBERTO

Yes. And I usually complain about expensive escarole too. Boring old me. Guilty as charged.

MARY

And about stuff I love... like the delicious new flavors of ice cream over at the Goat House Creamery. I want to try their new caramel mango crunch!

UMBERTO

Oh yeah! Shall we go tonight?

MARY

Possibly.... And about those talking dogs...

UMBERTO

Talking dogs?

MARY

Ha! I just wanted to see if you were listening!

(Sits for a moment.)

UMBERTO

Really, Mary!

MARY

(calming down, softly humming “Oh what a beautiful morning” to herself)

All right. I don't know what's making me giddy... Maybe all the seriousness.

UMBERTO

And seriousness at the right times is what we need, after all, right?

MARY

Right, and so I will answer what you asked me before...

Well, what counts in the well-lived life is having people who love you -- and who you love back.

UMBERTO

Yes, that's probably most important. And you have that in your life. Now as before. And?

MARY

Taking care of others, enjoying life, where I see injustice working for change, appreciating art and walking the righteous path.

How's that for a list, huh? *(pleased with herself)* Ha, ha, ha!

Those are *my* meanings of life, and I'm not at all certain you are adding to my knowledge, Umberto Cellini!

(MARY rises to toss bark)

UMBERTO

You've taught me as well.

MARY

One thing you could help me figure out...is... Why, if I am with the way of the Lord, do I feel I still need....

UMBERTO

Something more? *(MARY nods)*

(He picks up a piece of bark from the ground)

Take this leaf.... Hold it. *(she does)* The Lord wants us to gather the most meaning and beauty from our lives... as you do every day. St. Peter said: ““What matters is not your outward appearance. . . but your inner disposition. Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle gracious kind that God delights in.”

MARY

You're right, like about this pretty piece of bark, if we look at it closely, I see all its beautiful structure and color... But some things I hear are s confusing... Tell me something Umberto, tell me about existence-ism. I heard about it on the radio. I couldn't follow it. But I bet you could give me the Umberto version. Nice and clear-cut. Can you do that for Old Mary?

UMBERTO

Well, I can try. You see, an existentialist – and that’s what they’re called – they don’t see that amazing sky above us, and think: “How glorious is the Lord’s creation!”

MARY

That’s a shame.

UMBERTO

Look up now, Mary.

MARY

Oh, it is sooo lovely!

MARY

Sure... OMG, look over there. Isn’t that Joye Schwartz painting one of Mandy Levine’s gorgeous flowers. (JOYE or person playing her holds up one of Joye’s painting) I love the delicacy of her brushstrokes, don’t you, Umbie?

UMBERTO

I always have. And Mandy adds so much to the beauty of our neighborhood with her gardening. She is amazing! (*teasing her*) You should pick up a few tricks for your own painting from Joye, Mary.

MARY

Don’t mis-underestimate me. Don’t tell me what I can and cannot do. Even if you’re gettin’ your coaching from... Saint Peter.

UMBERTO

Mary. I will soon have something very important to tell you. But not now.

MARY

Jesus, Mary and Joseph— stop scaring me! (*suddenly contrite*)
Forgive me, Lord, for using your name in vain.

UMBERTO (*looking to their left*)

Now here is a young lady you're going to enjoy meeting!

MARY (*amazed, looks stage right*)

MARY

Why she looks like me -- when I was nineteen! (*after a significant pause, approaching, hand to mouth on amazement, stands*)
Are... are you **me?!!!**

MARY YOUNGER

Yes, I am.

MARY

(*shows more stunned silence*)

MARY YOUNGER

And I know about your life. I'm very pleased with the way I've turned out. The way you've lived it.

MARY (to UMBERTO)

The way I've turned out!! Can you imagine? (to YOUNGER) Are you are pleased? How do you know me?

MARY YOUNGER

Well, here they let you go backwards and forwards. So I've followed you.

MARY (*worried*)

What? ... Are you stalking me?

MARY YOUNGER

No, only looking out for your best interests. I like your direction!

MARY (to UMBERTO)

She likes my direction! Oh? What in the world?

UMBERTO

Maybe best not to ask too many questions.

MARY

How can I help myself? She seems too real. ... If she knows the past, maybe she knows my future. How will I turn out? What's ahead? I'm not so sure I want to know.

MARY YOUNGER

It looks good. Like your friend says, best not to ask too many questions. Look at me closely (*holds Mary's face aggressively*) --- Take advantage of every day. (*beat*) And we'll both be fine...

MARY (*dis-believing*)

Frankly, I'm having a hard time with all of this.

MARY YOUNGER

But now, you'd better call the police about the fire up the block... at the Browns... They're very old and extremely weak... and might not get out in time...

MARY

But I have a question to --

*(YOUNG KARL enters and MARY and UMBERTO
move to where Mary and Young Karl were and exchange
positions to show an earlier time)*

UMBERTO

Sorry.

[chime]

[to audience]

That will have to wait—

MARY

I'm getting tired of waiting!

STAGE MANAGER (*dons hat*)

There will be a 5-minute intermission now. Get your refreshments, but be quick about it... You won't want to miss what's to come!

[brief intermission]

Act 2, Scene 1**STAGE MANAGER**

As our story resumes, the Browns' house is still on fire.

(MARY and UMBERTO move to where KARL YOUNGER and MARY YOUNGER had been.

They exchange positions, showing a shift to an earlier time)

UMBERTO calls fire department.

*MARY YOUNGER retreats as if
back to a different existence)*

UMBERTO (on cell)

Hello? I'd like to report a raging fire at 719 Cedar in Melrose Park. Yes.... Two elderly disabled people inside and in extreme danger.... It's very urgent! Please get here as soon as possible.

(to MARY)

My God, hurry up! Let's go see if we can be helpful.

(Sfx: On stage a fade out .

FIRST chime indicating passage of time.

(SFX: deafening fire engine sirens. MARY holds her ears)

BOTH MARYS

My god!!

(YOUUNG MARY and YOUNG KARL are standing looking in amazement at the blaze across the street.

Leaving MARY YOUNGER and KARL standing nearby.)

MARY YOUNGER

Why don't they forget about hooking up the fire hoses and just go in?

YOUNG KARL

They'd better go in soon!

(SFX screaming)

MARY YOUNGER

I can't believe this is happening! *(takes shelter in KARL's arms)*

KARL YOUNGER

Damn! If **they** don't go in soon, I'LL go in!

MARY YOUNGER

Oh no, Karl, my god – you'll be killed!

KARL YOUNGER

I don't know. I just don't know. The firemen look like they're about to go in! But those flames! Sweet Jesus!!!

BOTH MARYS

My god!

MARY YOUNGER

Those crazy flames! Why don't they go in? Oh, oh oh! Those poor people! I can't take it!

(MARY YOUNGER screams and faints.

KARL YOUNGER catches her. Stage left.)

Scene 2

(SFX: chime. Back in the present)

(On stage fade as well.)

UMBERTO

Too bad their house burned to the ground.

MARY

A quiet couple... I didn't follow up with them... I was too wrapped up in my own business back then.... Where did they go from Melrose Park?

UMBERTO

They moved to a nursing home, where they were well cared for, for many years.

MARY

But after, what about their fate? One that perhaps St. Peter set for them?

UMBERTO

Who can know?

MARY

Oh *you* know. You just don't want to say,

UMBERTO (*cagily with a sly smile*)

Well, I do know that the house burned so hot that only a few charred sticks were left. ... *That* might happen to the world someday, as Revelation tells us. Including the seven-headed dragon. I don't want to remind you of what he does.

MARY

Please don't. I need you to be discrete. Even if it's scripture, there's only so much I can--

UMBERTO

Mary, there're lots of things I won't say and don't want to say.

MARY

Lord! How many horrible memories do you have stored in that calm head of yours?

UMBERTO

But so many happy, even ecstatic memories too. Stay with me, and you might hear them.

MARY (*scolding tone*)

UMBERTO, you're so very flippant about these things. I believe what you said about knowing things now, and still I'm very disturbed about something. I've been meaning to ask you or maybe Karl, if you can't do it, about--

UMBERTO

Patience is a virtue, Mary.... If I must...

STAGE MANAGER (donning hat)

We'll have a bit of an intermission now.

Act 3

[after a brief intermission, UMBERTO and MARY resume their walk in silence. They can be in a different position on the stage.]

MARY

Our neighborhood has so many talented people, each singing a unique song, don'tcha think, UMBERTO?

UMBERTO

Mmm. yes. But not as a cacophony. More as a polyphonous work.

MARY

Yeah, or like an iridescent fish, a rainbow trout maybe. So many lovely any colors, gliding through Tookany Creek. *(sings)* Somewhere over the rainbow.... *(UMBERTO laughs)* Oh Humbie, I always like it when I make you laugh!

UMBERTO

Indeed. Our souls are so alike! Oh, there's Caryl. Hi Caryl! How are you?

CARYL

Not so good. Did you see what happened today in the Senate? You two should get more involved! But to answer your question, I am busy, too busy! But never too busy to talk to you two! Say, can you come to tomorrow's noon rally at city hall downtown?

And I have three petitions for everybody here to sign. Come see me after the show!

UMBERTO

We can probably both help. But what's the issue?

CARYL

Issue? Like there's only one? Tomorrow it's a decent minimum wage for all Pennsylvania. Then on Thursday, we have canvassing for politicians who can make a difference here in the Township. It's at 2 pm in Wall Park. Can you make it to both?

MARY

We'll let you know.

CARYL

For sure?

UMBERTO

For sure!

MARY

UMBERTO

Oh, I wonder what piece he's working on now with the orchestra.

Hey Phil! What're you working on?

PHIL

Vivaldi, it's gonna be great! Come down Verizon Hall this Saturday and listen for yourself! I have two free tickets. Want them?

(PHIL offers the tickets. MARY accepts them.)

MARY

Whoa! We'll take 'em!

UMBERTO

Thanks! Phil, I have something to ask you that I've been meaning to.... What does it feel like to be in the midst of all that great orchestral music and even contributing to it?

PHIL

Oh! Nobody ever asks me about that... funny. But I tell you, Umberto and Mary, it is a pleasure like no other! Whether it's Vivaldi or Paganini I am in the midst, and when I'm playing – well! It's simply ecstatic. You'll have to take my word for it!

UMBERTO

Thanks, Phil! *(moving on)* Do you see what this means, Mary?

MARY

What? That we can walk around the neighborhood and chat with our friends?

UMBERTO

THOSE are just some of your meanings! Look, lady! There's richness all round you. So you should never despair or think you haven't gotten enough from life.

(They sit)

MARY

What about all the injustice in the world? The poverty, the wars, the need for universal health care in our rich nation? I mean, we have plenty of billionaires. Why can't they help out? Don't they know any poor people?

UMBERTO

Jesus said in Matthew 26, "The poor you will always have with you." So maybe you're expecting too much.

MARY

Oh, quotes. Quotes from scripture or anything else...Forgive me, Mother Mary, and St. Peter, and you, Umberto... but I always feel cheated. I must have a case of spiritual FOMO.

UMBERTO

Hmm?

MARY

You know, Fear of Missing Out. And I worry too much about those around me. For example, what the heck *else* is going to go wrong with my son and his selfish wife? And his darned alcoholic daughter. What did he --- or we -- do to deserve this? I pay my taxes! I follow the Scripture!

UMBERTO

Now now now. Some of these quotes are remedies, so don't dismiss them all. Let us recall Matthew 25. We must care for the "least of these." Including the poor and the sick.

(MARY thinks on this for a moment.)

MARY

Thank you for correcting me. I over-reacted.

UMBERTO

And you will do the same for me when I err or stray. Hmm. Here, let me listen to your heart. *(leans in a bit, hand to ear.)*

MARY

Yes, doctor.

UMBERTO

I detect a strong ticker... one that perhaps one that **usually** cares too much. Hmm... *[spies young Karl and Mary Younger}* Do you want to guess who those people are?

MARY

Why those are... I'm getting upset....

(KARL hands MARY a water bottle. She takes a sip.

MARY spies MARY YOUNGER and KARL. MARY gasps.

She cowers behind UMBERTO as the younger pair enter.)

MARY YOUNGER

Oh Karl! You say the sweetest things!

KARL

But I always mean them. You are the prettiest girl on campus.
And the most intelligent and articulate.

MARY

Do you say that to Ellen too? I see how you look at her. Don't deny it.

KARL

Jeez, a guy has to look. I mean I'm not made of ceramic. But she can't hold a candle to you... not even an incense candle!

*(MARY YOUNGER and KARL stop back
and fade from the scene)*

MARY

Oh Umbie, how can you just do that? I feel as if I'm hallucinating. What did you put in that water? How are we both seeing things you couldn't know about? The strong younger me and poor Karl when he was young and vigorous?

UMBERTO

Oh yes, that and more. But I have to use these powers judiciously. Am I frightening you?

MARY

You are, but I'm a big girl. I can take it.... I think.

UMBERTO

So I have to ask.... What meaning of life do you accept from that little interlude?

MARY

Well, I see that we were so happy back then.

UMBERTO

And?

MARY

And that later we didn't do the, uh....

UMBERTO

The deed?

MARY

Well, not until we got married. And I saw that the good lord meant for us to have so many beautiful experiences, and if we are fortunate, to feel true love.

UMBERTO

It's all part of the same continuum, including now.

MARY

Yes, but please don't stop! Are they going to reappear?

UMBERTO

I'm not sure. Let's ask Albert. I think that's him standing there right now. (*points, then waves*)

(*CHIME*)

MARY

Albert, how are you?

ALBERT (*played by the KARL actor*)

Fine! This play is almost as much fun to write writing as living life!

MARY

Really? Are you Albert, the playwright?

ALBERT

No, not really. I play him, and I know the real one. I do have some influence on both, true. But let's leave it at that.

UMBERTO

Can I ask you just one more question?

ALBERT

No, but you'd better have a wise answer to the question that Mary is going to pose.

UMBERTO

You have a question for me?

MARY

Haven't you been listening?

ALBERT

Now I have to get back to my writing.

MARY

What are you working on?

UMBERTO

Wait! Aren't you even going to give me some smart dialogue?

ALBERT

No. You figure it out this time. I'm sure you'll do fine. Ciao!

MARY to UMBERTO

That was a strange interlude. Well, since you're asking... So advise me, please.

UMBERTO

Stranger things have happened. So what **is** your question?

MARY

I'm going crazy over what to do about my mom!

UMBERTO

Elizabeth? I haven't seen her in awhile.

MARY

Well, you know – she’s been on my third floor in her apartment, decompensating more every day. I can’t even have a conversation with her anymore.

I’ve prayed to Mary for guidance.

UMBERTO

And?

MARY

Mary, blessed Mary says: Do the compassionate thing. And *this* Mary – me (*meaning herself*) – says if I keep paying for healthcare aides, I’ll go bankrupt.

UMBERTO

Have you considered a nursing home?

MARY

Of course I have, but I promised her long ago that I’d never put her in a home. What should I do?

UMBERTO

I saw this day coming.

MARY

You did?

UMBERTO

Yes.... St. Peter put it simply to me... If Elizabeth in a nursing home is happy, as she may very well be...

MARY

Yes.

UMBERTO

And she will barely know where she is.

MARY

I think not, I say a rosary every day that she won't be aware.

UMBERTO

Then your promises to her may be forgiven... As Blessed Mary said to you -- Do the compassionate thing. That's all that can be asked of you. Compassionate towards you and towards your mom.

Does that sound right... in your head and in your heart?

MARY (elated)

Why, yes! I needed to hear it from someone I trust...

*(MARY reaches over to possible kiss UMBERTO.
He graciously demurs.)*

UMBERTO

Not yet, Mary. Not yet. And we have our work.

MARY

[MARY turns sideways and mutters angrily]

We have our work!

UMBERTO

Look – there's Pearl!

MARY

Pearl, great to see you out and about!

PEARL

I'm equally delighted. Want to sit with me a bit?

UMBERTO

Si, si.

PEARL

Whenever I see you two strolling together, I feel so, so... why it's just like Charles and I were in the 1940's. And it was bliss!

UMBERTO

Mary and I were having a discussion about some difficult choices that must be made soon. You've had a few of those, eh?

PEARL

Oh my, haven't I? I think sometimes about back during the blitz un London, I was too young to appreciate everything. But I knew, I knew. And people were so brave. We Brits. We brits were an inspiration to the world. The sounds of the V1 buzz bombs got closer and closer while we hid in the air raid shelters. Even while the Buzz bombs were exploding, people were helping one another. And somehow, they got me to safety in the countryside. Those were trying times, let me tell you.

UMBERTO

Pearl, what can you tell Mary and me about keeping our sanity, when we're unsure, when we are stressed?

PEARL

Well, as you might recall, I am deep into Yoga-- Practicing and teaching. I find it gives me tremendous peace of mind. Remember, you have a standing offer for a free lesson from me, anytime, okay?

UMBERTO

I'm not sure our Monsignor would approve of that.

PEARL

Oh he will once I talk with him for a few minutes. Very compatible with all of your beliefs. Hey, I know you have to move on but I want to share a thought with you...

Remember that people have dealt with far worse than you're facing and kept their heads, placing one foot ahead of the other, like this. Remember to love all what's around you... and you'll be fine. So nice seeing you!

(PEARL leaves or waves good-bye)

MARY

Good bye Pearl. And thank you! Ya know, I'm hearing Pearl....
And now I'm also enjoying these majestic oaks and tulip trees
above us! How... superb life is!

UMBERTO (*picking up a piece of bark*)

Those trees have seen so much of our neighborhood. Especially
the oaks and sycamores. They carry the weight of our decades
within them.... It's almost as if they remember our histories in
these fragments of bark...

And there's Nathan! The conscience of the neighborhood, as I
think of him.

MARY

Don't you love his daily emails on world affairs. Hi, Nathan!
How he does it, I don't know. So many topics, and with such
passion. He really cares. And he puts such eloquence into what he
writes.

UMBERTO

I truly admire him.... Well, just one tour around the block has
been pretty amazing. Wouldn't you agree?

MARY

Yes... I do. You know, I've been so worried about my mom, So
much to appreciate, to learn from. *Different* meanings of life, I
think. So much that I forgot there's so much we can take from
Jesus, Mary and Joseph. And from ourselves.

UMBERTO

And those who've taught us the Golden Rule... Hey... look who's
behind that giant oak? Do they look familiar?

MARY YOUNGER

Mary! Learn from us! Learn from your own past!

KARL

And your present. What we had together, what you can have again.

MARY YOUNGER

Don't waste this time – your time.

KARL

It's all you have!

KARL and MARY YOUNGER

(retreating, facing forward, getting quieter and more distant)

Don't waste! Don't Waste! It's all you have! All you have!

MARY

Dear Lord!

UMBERTO

I have one more stop planned for us on this stroll.

MARY

Stroll? Haven't we had enough?

UMBERTO

Yes. Well... There's someone who's been wanting to speak with you...

MARY

Who?

UMBERTO

Just listen to his voice... Someone you used to know quite well.

MARY

Not...

UMBERTO

Yes.

MARY

Karl?

UMBERTO

Here he is.

(She hesitates)

KARL

(raspy voiced, not seen by the characters, who act as if they do not know where the voice is coming from)

Mary?

MARY

Karl?

KARL

Yes... It's me.

MARY

Is it really you?

KARL

I'll prove it to you... Remember dancing at the Edison Ballroom with me in Manhattan? 1962?

MARY

Yes! *Begin the Beguine!* It was an old tune even then! How are you?

KARL

(this exchange can be played for humor.

KARL lies on a bench as if half-dead)

Not so well....

I'm dead.

Pretty unpleasant. From a human perspective. Mostly deteriorated. I thought I was deteriorated before I died, but let me tell you, this is something else.... So your friend here has a passport to St. Peter, and I beseeched him to let me communicate with you. And here I am.

We stiff don't mind it after awhile. We kind of get used to the inactivity.... Mary, you know I'm kidding. My soul is fully alive.

MARY

I imagine that as lively as you were all your life, you're a standout. You still have that crazy sense of humor.

KARL

That's what they say. That I'm the wildest headstone in the cemetery.
Although it is pretty hard to do standup.

MARY

Tell me, Karl... Do you ever get to eat angelfood cake?

KARL

Ask me about the DEVIL'S FOOD CAKE here. It lives up to its name!

MARY

I am so stunned! ... I thought it must be absolutely miserable being dead. It must be really, all humor aside, I mean -- How can you stand it?

KARL

I have no choice, to tell the truth.... But I have a special message for you.

MARY

(to herself) Why do I feel my life will be changed by this? *(to KARL)* Oh? I'm listening.

KARL

Seize every opportunity. So many living people don't. Just grab life and enjoy it. Mother Mary protects us all. She wants you to know everything will work out.

(MARY nods agreement)

KARL

Promise me you will follow your heart. It's the path to happiness.

MARY

All right, I promise. Though I have to warn you, I'm not always good about keeping promises.

KARL

I don't keep score, that's St. Peter's job. I may not get another chance to talk to you. And Mary?

MARY

Yes, Karl.

KARL

I still love you, Mary. Good bye.

MARY

Good Bye, dear one.... *(to UMBERTO)* That was so strange, and lovely. Thank you.

SFX: CHIME

STAGE MANAGER (to audience)

And there you have it. A slice of life, and of death. In an ordinary suburb. Well, maybe not so ordinary. *(slight laugh)* We hope you've enjoyed our small town odyssey.. And now we return you to your pilgrimage.

UMBERTO *(to MARY)*

Continue our walk?

MARY

By all means.

UMBERTO

I feel a song coming on, Will you join me?

MARY

If I know the tune. It's about your name, a grand ole name.

(Mary's a Grand Old Name

By George M. Cohan)

Mary: Ohhh...

My mother's name was Mary

She was so good and true

Because her name was Mary

She called me Mary too... (we'll skip the second part of the verse)

Umberto:

And it was Mary, Mary

Plain as any name can be

But in propriety society

We'll say Marie

Young Mary & Young Karl enter singing:

For it was Mary, Mary

Long before the fashions came

And there is something there

That sounds so square

ALL:

...It's a grand old name.

(They sing or hum and dance to Mary's A Grand Old Name (George M. Cohan) from 1:14 onwards on this site: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JdQDff4QcE&list=RD9JdQDff4QcE&start_radio=1

MARY

Oh I do love that one!

(strolling happily, arm in arm or dancing)

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THE END