

# MICK'S LAST LINE

by Nick Amatzio

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# MICK'S LAST LINE

## Characters

MICK BRANDON, 39, writer, thin, weary-looking

EMMA BRANDON, 27, teacher, attractive, well dressed/BETH/ASTRID/RENAY

ALDO DEBONE, 23, performer, Italian, slick, confident/DR ALAN LOWE, 51, busy, optimist

VIOLA GERDA, 25, sexy, Swedish dental hygenist/GRACE/CATHY/NURSE LINDA ASHLIN, 35, British, pretty, athletic/ 2ND NURSE older. Been around.

FATHER BOYD, 69, R.C. Priest, Irish, big, tough, old school

## Time:

Summer 2014

## Settings:

1. Mick's office/writing room
2. City street in front of the Brandon apartment/city street a few blocks away
3. Restaurant/cafe
4. Hospital room

## Acts and Scenes:

Act I - 12 scenes

Act II - 5 scenes

ACT 1

(Toronto 2014)

(A hot, summer afternoon.)

SCENE 1

(The sound of MOZART playing loudly while the clicking sound of typing is heard during brief silent pauses.)

(LIGHTS up on MICK BRANDON, 39, in jeans, slippers and a damp t-shirt. He's at his desk, writing away. A desk lamp, computer and printer on one side; a coffee mug and an almost empty box of chocolates on the other.)

(A wastebasket is packed with crumpled paper. Paperbacks are piled on overloaded shelves. A window blind tries to keep the sun out.)

(MICK stops writing. Rubs his forehead, wipes the perspiration off his face with a tissue, then lowers the music, plucks a chocolate from the box and nibbles on it while editing a printed page.)

MICK

Oh God ...

(He crosses out half the page, puts down his pen, stands away from his desk and drops to the floor. He does six push ups, gets back up, reaches for another chocolate and sits.)

MICK

(to the audience)

I can't work in this inferno. The devil himself would object. Just my luck the damn AC breaks down during a heat wave.

(He scratches out a few lines, turns up the volume and resumes his attack on the keyboard.)

(EMMA BRANDON, 27, attractive, in a short skirt, low top, heels, strolls in. Mick doesn't see or hear her.)

EMMA  
Mick. Mick! Jesus Christ!

*(EMMA turns off the speakers.)*

*(SILENCE fills the room.)*

*(MICK looks up.)*

MICK  
Huh? Oh hi, babe.

EMMA  
How can you think with that noise on?

MICK  
Was that a glint in your eyes? Am I missing a blue moon?

EMMA  
Don't you even think about sex in this heat. How can you work like this? Must you play your elevator music so loud?

MICK  
That was Mozart. His melodies help me think.

EMMA  
No wonder you're not published. I must've been blind, out of my mind and too kind.

MICK  
You go shopping?

EMMA  
I picked up a few things.

MICK  
Get any grapefruit?

EMMA  
Oh you and your grapefruit.

MICK  
Grapefruit are packed with vitamins. Get any Aspirin?

EMMA  
We're out already?

MICK  
My head's been killing me all week.

EMMA  
Try turning off the music.

MICK

You know I need music when I write.

EMMA

Oh please. Why don't you get a real job?

MICK

Writing's hard work

EMMA

You don't have to be a writer. It's not written in stone.

MICK

What?

EMMA

No one's holding a gun to your head. In case you haven't noticed, there are plenty of writers, living and dead, in the library. They don't need you. There's enough books to go around.

MICK

Not this again. You know I have to write. I-I have no choice.

EMMA

Because you're crazy.

MICK

What's so crazy about writing?

EMMA

Want my advice?

MICK

I live for your advice.

EMMA

Look for a new line of work.

*(MICK admires her body, stands, stretches, reaches for her.)*

MICK

Are you sure it's not a blue moon somewhere?

*(EMMA spots the empty box of chocolates.)*

EMMA

You finished another box?

MICK

I always finish what I start. That's my motto.

EMMA

You're like that nutty killer who can't stop in "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," only you're a chocoholic instead.

MICK

Wasn't Eli Wallach great? Love that film. The point is, chocolate helps me write. Think. Studies have shown -

EMMA

Please. Not another of your studies.

MICK

I don't have much to live for. Must you insist on spoiling my treats?

EMMA

Know what all that junk does to your cholesterol?

MICK

Grapefruit balances it out. That's why I asked you to -

EMMA

I was busy. Well, do what you want. I've had enough. I'm tired of waiting and I bet you forgot about tonight.

MICK

Don't tell me we're having dinner with the Ramsden's again? Earl's so pretentious ...

EMMA

Sally's my best friend.

MICK

Is their AC working?

EMMA

I'm sure it is.

MICK

I can always stuff cotton in my ears before he gets into one of his ultra-boring `what a big success I am' recitals.

EMMA

He is a big success.

MICK

He's an insurance salesman.

EMMA

Who makes six figures a year.

MICK

So do loan sharks. News flash! Money isn't everything. I-I'd rather donate half my liver than do what Earl does.

EMMA

I should have you committed. I'd do the world a big favour.

MICK

He's a crook. Google his name and you come up with: shyster, charlatan, deceiver, pretender, quack. Take your pick. Otherwise he's a stand-up guy working for a stand-up company.

EMMA

And right next to your name, you'd find failure, loser, dreamer, wanna-be, amateur.

MICK

A professional writer is an amateur who never quit. Quote. Unquote. Richard Bach.

(pause)

You know, Jonathan Livingstone Seagull?

EMMA

Never heard of him.

(pause)

Look Mick, I know you poured your heart and soul into your writing. Sometimes I would come outside your door in the middle of the night, listen to you work away ... I wanted you to succeed so badly. Would have been nice to not worry about money for a change ... Things could have been different -

MICK

They will be Emma. I'm working on a new -

EMMA

It's time to face reality. You have to grow up.

MICK

Like Earl?

EMMA

Yes.

MICK

He's a thief, Emma. T-h-i-e-f.

EMMA

The heat's really gotten to you.

MICK

He should run for office. He'd fit right in with the rest of the phonies.

EMMA

Least he knows how to provide. You should have gone into teaching.

MICK

I wanted to be different.

EMMA

Congratulations. You succeeded.  
*(stretches her hands out)*  
Here's normal and here's you.

MICK

He's ripping people off, Emma. He has no soul and he works for a soulless industry. They're a match made in heaven.

EMMA

Please spare me the cliches.

MICK

He's a vampire who sucks money from people who don't have any to spare.

*(bares his teeth like a vampire)*

Never stops until he's down to the marrow in their poor bones.

EMMA

God, you're so melodramatic. No wonder we don't communicate. Have a nice boring life. You and your books. Bye!

*(She leaves. EXITS stage left.)*

MICK

Emma? Emma wait!

*(LIGHTS dim as he gets up and runs after her, stage left.)*

## SCENE 2

*(One minute later. In front of the BRANDON apartment.)*

*(EMMA fans herself with her cell phone. Two suitcases are by her side as a Ferrari screeches to a stop (off stage right))*

*(ALDO, 23, handsome and somehow unaffected by the sweltering heat, wearing sporty clothes, enters stage right, whistling a happy tune. He sees Emma and slides over.)*

ALDO

Cara mia!

*(They embrace. He lifts her off her feet and then lets her down gently. They kiss passionately.)*

MICK (O.S.)

Emma, let's talk about -

*(MICK enters stage right. Stops. Stares. Can't believe his eyes.)*

MICK

Hey? What's going on?

*(Emma and Aldo separate. ALDO whispers in EMMA's ear. She giggles, slaps his chest lightly, glances back at Mick.)*

EMMA

Relax. He's just a friend.

MICK

Friends don't tickle each other's tonsils with their tongues ...

*(ALDO whispers in Emma's ear again. She giggles again.)*

EMMA

Stai scherzando?

ALDO

No bella ...

*(MICK storms over, taps Emma's shoulder.)*

MICK

Excuse me.

*(ALDO lets go of Emma for a moment.)*

ALDO

Si?

MICK

That's my wife you're exchanging saliva with.

ALDO

Si. Grazie. Emma e una bella donna. Grazie mille.

EMMA

Aldo, inglese! Inglese!

*(ALDO turns away. EMMA whispers in his ear. They giggle.)*

MICK

Now hold on, Emma. You owe me an explanation, dammit.

*(ALDO and EMMA separate.)*

EMMA

Alright, you were going to find out sooner or later. Aldo, mio stupido marito, Mick.

*(ALDO rushes over, grabs Mick's head and kisses his cheeks European style.)*

ALDO

Ah! Piacere! Piacere!

EMMA

Aldo. Inglese! Inglese!

ALDO

Scusa bella.

*(to Mick)*

Nice to meet you ... eh, what is your ... name?

MICK

Mick.

EMMA

*(applauds)*

Molto bene, Aldo. Molto bene.

ALDO  
Grazie, bella mia. Eh, thank you.

MICK  
*(to Emma)*  
I didn't know you could speak Italian.

EMMA  
I've only been going to night school twice a week for the last two years.

MICK  
Oh, that's where you went. I always wondered.  
*(to Aldo)*  
Look you can't fool around with my wife in front of my face.

EMMA  
He can fool around with me whenever he wants.

MICK  
We'll discuss this later.  
*(looking off stage right)*  
Wow! Nice wheels. That a Ferrari?

ALDO  
Eh ... si. Yes. Is mine. All-mine. You like?

EMMA  
Molto bene, Aldo. Molto bene.

ALDO  
Grazie.  
*(to Mick)*  
Eh ... Here is my card.

MICK  
*(reads the card)*  
Aldo Debone. Exotic dancer/car insurance. Low rates. Right. I've heard that before.

*(MICK returns the card. ALDO is hurt. Tries to hide his pain. He steps back to Emma's side and she consoles him.)*

EMMA  
Non ti preoccupare, ciccino, Mick non capsice niente.

MICK  
Translate. So I should know if I should slug him or not.

EMMA  
I said, "Don't worry, sweetie, Mick doesn't understand anything." Feel better now?

*(EMMA hugs Aldo. They kiss.)*

MICK

No!

EMMA

Honestly, you'd think you never seen a man and a woman kiss before.

MICK

But you're my wife.

EMMA

Must you rub it in? At least, make yourself useful. Put my suitcases in the car.

MICK

Pardon me?

EMMA

You're so uncultured. Normally, Aldo would do his own lifting but he hurt his back.

MICK

He doesn't seem to be in any pain.

EMMA

*(to Aldo)*  
Un momento, per favore.

*(ALDO steps aside, takes out a comb and combs his hair with great care.)*

*(EMMA glares at MICK, makes a guttural animal sound, hisses like she's about to attack.)*

MICK

*(to the audience)*  
That's what I get for marrying a she-wolf.  
*(to Aldo)*

Hey Aldo!

*(ALDO sighs, steps forward.)*

MICK

She's all yours!

ALDO

Grazie! Grazie!

*(MICK picks up the suitcases. ALDO bows in appreciation.)*

MICK

Jesus, what's in here? Everything and the kitchen sink?

EMMA

You're never happy. All you do is complain.

*(to Aldo)*

E mai felice. Tutto quello che fa e lamentarsi.

ALDO

Bella mia. Non ti preoccupare, sono qui.

*(He gives her tiny little kisses up and down her arm, smiles back at Mick as they EXIT to his car stage right.)*

*(MICK follows, drags the suitcases on the ground and EXITS stage right. Suitcases are loaded into the car, off stage. SOUNDS of the the trunk and car doors slamming shut.)*

EMMA &amp; ALDO (O.S.)

*(laugh hysterically)*

Ciao! Arriverderci!

*(The Ferrari (off stage) honks twice. Takes off. MICK, engulfed in a cloud of smoke, re-enters coughs. Tries to wave the smoke away.)*

MICK

Guess this means we're not having dinner with Sally and Earl.

*(LIGHTS dim.)*

## SCENE 3

*(Six months later.)*

*(Back in Mick's writing room. The blind is still pulled down. The window rattles from the cold wind outside.)*

*(Mick's wearing old jeans, sweatshirt, a toque and trying to keep warm while writing. Soft music plays in the background. A framed photo of him, Emma and happier days is on the desk next to an Aspirin bottle. )*

*(He stares at the photograph.)*

MICK

H-how could you leave me?

*(He tries to get a grip on himself. He turns the photograph over, hits a few keys but stops.)*

*(He gets up and casually steps into the washroom. (offstage.) He shuts the door. It's quiet for a while.)*

*(Seconds later, the toilet flushes. Mick steps out looking relieved. He returns to his desk. Sits. Stares at the blank screen. He rubs his head.)*

MICK

*(to the audience)*

I must be setting the world record for headaches.

*(He opens the Aspirin bottle, taps out two pills., his last two, and tosses the bottle into the wastebasket.)*

*(He pops them in his mouth, washes them down with coffee and tries to get back to work but it's no use. He turns off his computer.)*

MICK

*(to the audience)*

It's been six months since Emma trotted off with her Italian gigolo. Well, he can have her, crazy mood swings and all. She's not the only fish in the water. I'll show her ...

*(LIGHTS dim as he EXITS stage right.)*

## SCENE 4

*(Two weeks later and for the rest of this scene, each time the lights go down, it's a different night.)*

*(LIGHTS up on a small round table covered with linen.)*

*(MICK is dressed casually. He sits at a table with BETH, 33, attractive. Mick checks his watch.)*

BETH

Hans was a creep. You into blindfolds or bondage?

MICK

Me? No. I can hardly tie my shoes unless I'm focussed.

BETH

Rupert was married. Things didn't work out with Blair. Wish I could forget about Fitz ... Trent or Trone had three mouthy kids ... You any good with names?

MICK

I'm better with faces. Um ...

BETH

Beth. Yeah, me too. If I've slept with a guy long enough, his name's imprinted on my brain but by that time, I wanna forget I ever met 'em. Enough about me ...

*(LIGHTS dim then up on MICK and ASTRID, 43, athletic with a wild look in her eyes.)*

ASTRID

You ski?

MICK

No.

ASTRID

Don't know what you're missing. Flying down a slope, defying gravity. Cold, sharp wind slapping your face, Everything's a blur.

MICK

I feel like that when I wake up in the morning with headaches.

ASTRID

You just need some exercise. I'm looking for someone to fly down Devil's landing with. Dave, my boyfriend, would tag along but the dummy's in the hospital.

MICK

You have a boyfriend?

ASTRID

Yeah. He lost control on the practice hill. Smacked right into a big pine tree. Totally his fault. He was checking for messages on his cell phone.

MICK

Is he okay?

ASTRID

He will be. In ten months or so. He's in rehab, now. Fractured his tibia, fibia, femur, lemur, whatever ... So whaddya say? Nothing to it. I could teach you.

MICK

Thanks but I'm not really into -

ASTRID

Why not? Chicken?

*(ASTRID makes chicken noises. MICK leaves her squawking. LIGHTS dim, then UP on MICK sitting with GRACE, 35, a quiet pretty woman and nicely-dressed.)*

GRACE

I loved biology. Holding onto dead animal parts that used to throb with life. I get goose bumps just thinking about it.

MICK

The smell of formaldehyde makes me nauseous.

GRACE

You get used to it.

MICK

In grade nine, I dissected a cat.

GRACE

Lucky! I had to wait 'til college to slice up my first cat.

*(GRACE whispers in his ear.)*

MICK

A scalpel? In your purse?

(GRACE nods. Pats her purse. Smiles.  
MICK leans back.)

MICK

Any other sharp objects I should know about?

(GRACE whispers in his ear. MICK  
checks his watch. LIGHTS dim, then UP  
on the same table.)

(MICK is with CATHY, 36, stern-faced  
but looking a bit sleepy. She yawns  
constantly when she's not checking her  
cell for messages. She puts her cell  
down. Looks down at her meal.)

CATHY

MMMM. This looks good. If I fall asleep, just wake me. I have  
a touch of narcolep -

(Suddenly she passes out. Her head  
lands into her dish. MICK lifts her  
head up and makes sure she's okay.  
Then he sighs, tucks his napkin in and  
starts eating. LIGHTS dim.)

(LIGHTS UP on MICK with RENAY, 42, a  
tough-looking red-head in a leather  
jacket.)

RENAY

(to Mick)

So ... you're a writer.

(to herself)

All the good ones are taken.

(to Mick)

Where's that goddamn waiter?

(She sees him off stage. Waves her  
empty glass.)

RENAY

HEY MAC! I'M THIRSTY!

(turns, smiles)

So ... write anything I read?

(MICK shakes his head.)

RENAY

CHRIST! MAKE IT A DOUBLE! EASY ON THE ICE!

(LIGHTS dim on RENAY and MICK.)

## SCENE 5

*(One month later. A cold winter day.  
City. Early evening.)*

*(MICK dressed in a coat, jeans and  
walking shoes, strollss down a street  
with his head down.)*

MICK

*(to the audience)*

I've got to remember to ask the clerk for a wrestling dvd.  
Once I view an hour's worth, that should make me comatose.

*(VIOLA GERDA, 25, a sexy Swedish  
dental hygienist walks in his  
direction. He doesn't see her. Someone  
whistles from off stage right.)*

VIOLA

*(in a Swedish accent)*

You wish!

*(She keeps walking.)*

MICK

*(to the audience)*

If by some fluke, my gray matter still twitches, watching a  
few taped sessions of The House of Commons in action, should  
do the trick. A more potent one-two punch to render me  
totally oblivious to life's pain I can't think of. I-I'll  
forget all my problems. Won't know my left foot from my  
right, just like most of our politicians. It'll be perfect.  
Goodbye misery. Hello mental suicide. Emma will regret she -

*(VIOLA and MICK collide.)*

VIOLA

Oh! Please watch where you are going!

*(MICK's eyes almost pop. He's  
speechless. He squints.)*

MICK

*(to the audience)*

My God, she's an angel!

*(to Viola)*

Uh ... uh ... So ... so ... rry.

VIOLA

No, no, is not your fault. It's okay. I understand. My cousin  
Inga is special. Please forgive me. Are you all right?

MICK

*(nods)*

I-I-I ...

*(VIOLA smiles. Pats his cheek. MICK wipes a tear.)*

VIOLA

Well, bye, now. Be careful.

*(VIOLA EXITS stage right. MICK waves.)*

MICK

*(looks up)*

I don't want to die! I-I want to live! My sad, pathetic moping days are over!

*(to the audience)*

Is it my fault sexy Swedish women make me nervous? No wonder I couldn't speak.

*(MICK runs to one side, then the other.)*

MICK

Wait! Damn. Where'd she go?

*(MICK EXITS stage right. An alley cat, off stage. jumps out of nowhere. Hisses. MICK trips. CAT screeches.)*

MICK (O.S.)

Yeooow!

*(SILENCE. SOUND of people running. Hushed voices off stage. LIGHTS dim.)*

VOICE (O.S.)

Someone call 9/11!

## SCENE 6

*(One day later. Night. A hospital room. A window with a view of wall to wall condos. Two beds.)*

*(MICK, in a hospital gown, is lying in bed asleep. He's attached to an IV and a heart monitor. A bandage on his head looks like a turban.)*

*(A medical chart on a clipboard hangs at the end of his bed. A TV's on a wall, a remote on his bedside table. A chair is by his bed.)*

*(A door leads to the washroom O.S.)*

*(A green chair is near another door which leads to the hallway. (O.S.)*

*(LIGHTS flicker occasionally. Hospital sounds can be heard coming from O.S.)*

*(DR LOWE, 51, strolls in with an armful of files and drops them on a chair. He glances at Mick's medical chart and makes a few notes. Then he steps to the window. Looks out.)*

MICK

*(awakens, sits up)*

Ohhhhh! What a crazy dream. All those doctors hovering over me. Ohhh my head.

*(DR LOWE turns, realizes MICK's conscious and dashes over.)*

MICK

Another doctor? Must be still dreaming. Guess this is part two.

DR LOWE

Mr Brandon, I presume?

MICK

*(looks up, jumps startled)*

Huh? Where am I?

DR LOWE

You're in Toronto General Hospital. I'm Dr Lowe.

MICK

*(touches his bandage)*

Hospital? What happened?

DR LOWE

You've had an accident.

MICK

Did I get hit by a car? There's some crazy drivers out there.

DR LOWE

According to several eyewitnesses, you fell down a manhole. You were lucky.

*(checks medical chart)*

You suffered a grade one concussion, a few bumps and bruises but no broken bones.

MICK

Last thing I remember, I-I was looking for a woman -

DR LOWE

In a sewer?

MICK

No. I met her on the street and-and this crazy psycho cat came out of nowhere. Hissed like it had rabies. Scared me half to death. Guess that's when I fell -

DR LOWE

You leapt back. Natural reaction.

*(Lights flicker on and off.)*

MICK

Is there something wrong with my vision? The lights keep flashing on and off.

DR LOWE

Your vision's fine. There was a blackout. We're on emergency generator power.

MICK

What happened?

DR LOWE

Nasty winter ice storm. Worst in about a hundred years. Power lines are down. City's a mess.

MICK

Oh crap. Guess I'll grab a cab.

*(MICK tries getting up but DR LOWE pushes him gently back in his bed.)*

DR LOWE

Mr Brandon, you can't.

MICK

Cabs on strike, too? Jesus, everyone's on strike these days. Doesn't anyone believe in working anymore?

DR LOWE

I'm afraid you can't leave.

MICK

Because of the ice storm?

DR LOWE

There's no easy way to say this. Brace yourself. You-you have a malignant brain tumour.

MICK

What? No way. That's nuts. There must be a mistake.

DR LOWE

I'm sorry.

MICK

I'm not dying. No way. I don't accept this. I'm not dying.

DR LOWE

You're in denial. That's stage one of the five stages of death followed by anger, bargaining, depression and last but certainly not least, acceptance.

MICK

This can't be happening. But you said I was okay.

DR LOWE

I said you didn't break anything. I wish I had better news.

MICK

Makes two of us. I feel like I'm in the Twilight Zone.

DR LOWE

Before your accident, were you getting any headaches?

MICK

Yeah. Some real killers.

DR LOWE

Uh huh. Were you taking anything for them?

MICK

Aspirin. Went through two bottles a month. I've been under a lot of stress lately.

DR LOWE

Any slurred speech or blurry vision?

MICK

Just headaches. Aren't there any drugs to shrink it?

DR LOWE

There are some experimental ones we can try but I'd like to give you at least one round of chemo before we go that route.

MICK

How about surgery? There must be something you can do.

DR LOWE

Unfortunately, the size and location of this particular growth rules out any surgical procedure of any kind.

MICK

Shit. How big is it?

DR LOWE

About the size of a grapefruit.

MICK

That's ironic. I love grapefruits. Maybe I ate too many.

*(DR LOWE pulls out a cat scan file sitting on the chair. He holds it up for Mick. Points.)*

DR LOWE

See this mass here? That's your brain tumour.

MICK

Hold on a sec. That brain looks like an extra large. I'm sure mine's only medium. There must be a mistake. I'm sure -

DR LOWE

You're still in denial, Mr Brandon. Of all the phases, denial usually takes the longest. I've seen it time and time again.

MICK

I-I can't die now. I-I'm only thirty-nine. God, where have the years gone? I-I remember grade school like yesterday. We were playing baseball, students against teachers. I was playing outfield. One of the male teachers hit a fly ball. I barely saw it going up but I saw it coming down. I was afraid of catching it. I-I don't know how but I caught it. I really did. I didn't even have a glove. Hardly stung my hands at all.

DR LOWE

Way to go.

MICK

Teachers couldn't believe it. I couldn't either. All the kids cheered. Even the older ones. That was the high point of my life. Jesus, it's been downhill ever since.

DR LOWE

Mr Brandon. I'm glad you caught it.

MICK

Um ... would you mind calling me, Mick?

DR LOWE

Sure, Mick.

MICK

Thanks. So how ... how long do I -

DR LOWE

A week. Two maybe. Three if you're lucky.

MICK

Holy shit! Has it been training for the Olympics?

DR LOWE

I believe it's been with you for a while.

MICK

This isn't fair. Hockey season's just starting.

DR LOWE

I used to catch a game but I'm too busy.

MICK

I'm a big Leaf fan. They haven't won since '67 but they're bound to win it one of these years and I-I won't be here. Doc, are you sure that brain's mine? You know how things get screwed up. A typo. Some clerical error. A wrong file. A computer glitch. Doesn't take much.

DR LOWE

I'm sure, Mick. Have you made out your will?

MICK

Haven't even done my income tax.

DR LOWE

Oh crap. Neither have I. Glad you reminded me. Oh, one more thing. Would you like burial or cremation?

MICK

Exactly what I ask myself every night before going to bed. Helps me fall asleep faster. How the hell do I know?

DR LOWE

Please think about it. In the meantime, we'll try to make you as comfortable as possible.

MICK

I-I feel like I'm facing a firing squad and you're offering me one last cigarette. Guess the joke's on me. I never smoked a cigarette in my life. Hell, I never even smoked pot.

*(DR LOWE raises an eyebrow.)*

MICK

I swear. Not once.

*(DR LOWE pulls out a pad from his pocket and clicks his pen.)*

DR LOWE

*(writing)*

Patient ... claims ... he's ... never ... smoked ... pot.

*(underlines it, looks up)*

Would you mind signing this? Otherwise my colleagues will think I'm making it up.

*(DR LOWE hands Mick his pen. Points to where he has to sign. Mick signs the note, hands back the pen. DR LOWE takes it and puts his pad away.)*

MICK

I still don't understand. How I -

DR LOWE

I'm sorry, Mick. I wish I knew the answer.

MICK

Maybe I over-worked my brain. Emma sure didn't think so. Did I, doc? Did I overwork my brain too much?

DR LOWE

It's possible. We all push ourselves but we're not machines. We need to recharge our batteries or -

MICK

We get brain tumours?

DR LOWE

Under constant strain, the human body breaks down one way or another. We all need a break. I was going to go to Vegas but I couldn't get away. Might go next month, catch a show or two. Play some golf.

MICK

I-I've never been there. Never been anywhere really. Never had the time or money -

DR LOWE

Mick, I-I'm sorry. That was very unprofessional of me. I haven't had a break for so long, I forgot about your situation. Any questions?

MICK

Yeah, what's your handicap?

DR LOWE

Women. Enough about me. Um, would you like to talk to a priest?

MICK

I was raised Catholic but I grew up.

*(DR LOWE pulls out a small card from his shirt pocket)*

DR LOWE

Well, we have a rabbi on call?

MICK

No thanks. He'll probably want to circumcise me.

DR LOWE

*(reads card)*

We also have a Swami, if you're Hindu, a Sheik, if you're Islamic and a Buddhist monk on speed-dial at the nurse's station if you're so inclined. There's also a Deacon, an Elder and a Shaman. I can have them paged, if -

MICK

I'd rather be alone.

DR LOWE

I understand. I know this is a lot to take in.

*(puts the card away)*

Why don't you meet Father Boyd in the meantime? He's filling in for our regular chaplain. Would mean a lot to him.

MICK

Okay, okay. But just for a moment.

DR LOWE

Great. He's a bit old school so try not to get him too excited. He has a heart condition.

*(DR LOWE steps away, opens the door, sticks his head out.)*

DR LOWE

Father?

*(DR LOWE sticks his head back in.  
Returns to Mick's bed.)*

DR LOWE

He must have wandered off somewhere. Mick, if you need anything, buzz Nurse Ashlin and she'll come running.

*(to himself)*

Too bad she's not like that outside the hospital.

*(MICK waves a sad goodbye. DR LOWE  
collects his files. Steps out. Sound  
and voices from the hallway offstage. )*

*(DOOR closes. Outside noises are  
muffled. MICK punches the bed, cries  
softly. LIGHTS dim.)*

## SCENE 7

*(Forty minutes later.)*

*(LIGHTS up on MICK who is asleep.)*

*(DR LOWE and FATHER BOYD, 69, Irish, big, with tough features, are nearby.)*

DR LOWE

*(taps Mick's file)*

Barring a miracle, he won't see the end of the month. Guess that's where you come in.

FATHER BOYD

*(Irish accent)*

Aye. Well, I'll pray for him.

*(MICK stirs awake. Opens his eyes.)*

FATHER BOYD

Hello there, Mr. Brandon, I'm Father Boyd. I truly wish we could have met under better circumstances.

*(MICK groans, turns away.)*

FATHER BOYD

I'm here if ye want to talk.

MICK

Maybe tomorrow.

FATHER BOYD

I'm a good listener. Mind if I call ye Mick, lad?

MICK

Call me whatever you want. I don't care.

FATHER BOYD

Is there anything I can get you?

MICK

How about a miracle or two?

FATHER BOYD

I know yer scared lad but I'm here to help anyway I can.

MICK

Good. Go away.

FATHER BOYD

I know it looks bad but ye mustn't lose hope.

*(MICK turns around, faces the priest.)*

MICK

Bad? I've got an inoperable brain tumour. Big as a - doc?

DR LOWE

A medium-sized grapefruit. Mick, we used your phone to call your wife. Unfortunately, we couldn't reach her.

*(DR LOWE hands the cell phone to Mick.)*

MICK

No surprise, there. I couldn't reach her either and I lived with her for nine years.

*(checks his messages)*

Collection agency called eighteen times, bank seven, dentist called again. They say they want to clean my teeth but they're only interested in cleaning out my wallet. Hydro, gas company. Oh Kate called. Man, she's going to kill me.

DR LOWE

Who's Kate?

FATHER BOYD

There's always another Eve to tempt -

MICK

She edited sixteen chapters of my new novel. I owe her money.

FATHER BOYD

Have ye forgotten about yer wife?

MICK

I'm working on it. Emma left me. We're kaput. History. Good thing we didn't have children.

FATHER BOYD

That's a shame. Ye have any brothers or sisters?

MICK

No siblings.

FATHER BOYD

And yer parents? Are they still -

MICK

My parents died on a canoe trip.

FATHER BOYD

Oh dear.

MICK

I was six. They got caught in a freak summer storm and drowned. They weren't wearing life jackets. Lucky for me, Aunt Hazel and Uncle Cyrus took me in.

FATHER BOYD

God shuts one door and quickly opens another.

MICK

I was nineteen when Uncle Cyrus drowned.

FATHER BOYD

Sweet Mother of Mary! Doesn't anyone in yer family believe in life jackets?

MICK

He drowned at home. In his bathtub.

DR LOWE

Happens more often than you think.

MICK

Cause of death was accidental drowning due to intoxication.

FATHER BOYD

Yer Aunt must've been devastated.

MICK

I don't know if she was devastated. She-she wasn't home. She was staying with her florist, Donna. Aunt Hazel loved flowers and their relationship - blossomed.

FATHER BOYD

It's always comforting having a close friend in sad times. Me favourite flower is the Queen of Shebas - a stunning orchid. Mind ye, the Hawaiian Bird of Paradise is a beauty, as well.

MICK

You don't understand. Aunt Hazel left Uncle Cyrus four months before he died. He was never drunk in his life but when he found out, she left him for Donna, he sure made up for it.

FATHER BOYD

But Donna's a woman.

DR LOWE

Father, remember your blood pressure.

FATHER BOYD

Oh my! No wonder yer so confused. Mick, it's obvious ye've had yer share of troubles. Pity ye don't have any children but infertility is nothin' to be ashamed of.

*(MICK sits up. FATHER BOYD helps him.)*

MICK

Father, I'm not infertile. I can have children. It's Emma. When it came to sex, she was - peculiar. Naturally I didn't know before we married.

FATHER BOYD

Oh dear. I've heard stories. Can ye clarify?

*(DR LOWE grabs a chair, brings it close to Mick's bed.)*

MICK

We could only do it during a celestial event like a blue moon or an eclipse.

DR LOWE

That is peculiar. Sun or moon?

MICK

If a comet flew by, she could really let herself go. I spent a lot of sleepless nights by our window straining my neck, hoping to see one whiz by. She also insisted I wear two condoms. By the time I got them on, she lost interest.

FATHER BOYD

YE USED FECKING CONDOMS?

MICK

She wouldn't go on the pill.

FATHER BOYD

Birth control's a grave sin, lad. A grave, grave sin!

*(FATHER BOYD whips out his inhaler, puffs away.)*

DR LOWE

Easy, Father. Why don't you sit? Take a load off.

*(gives the priest his chair)*

Mick ... remember our talk?

MICK

Father, when you want, when you NEED love - you don't ask too many questions.

FATHER BOYD

How long since yer last visit to church, lad?

MICK

*(coughs)*

Nine years. Give or take a week. I've been kind of busy.

FATHER BOYD

Sweet Jesus in heaven! That means ye missed Holy Mass ...

*(FATHER BOYD pulls a large calculator from inside his jacket pocket. Works it like a seasoned accountant.)*

FATHER BOYD

*(gasps)*

Four hundred, sixty-eight times, not includin' holy days!  
When ye're not at church, yer turnin' yer back on our Lord!

DR LOWE

Mick, as your physician, I strongly suggest you refrain from -

*(LIGHTS go out. Everything's dark for a few seconds. Then they come back on.)*

*(FATHER BOYD leaps to his feet, takes a few puffs from his puffer.)*

FATHER BOYD

Don't ye see? Ye're not givin' yer soul a fightin' chance!

MICK

Oh please . Religions ignore science, disregard fact, trust superstition, lack logic and forbid free thought.

FATHER BOYD

What?

DR LOWE

Oh crap. Here we go.

MICK

Rabbis slaughter chickens so it will wipe away sins.

DR LOWE

No kiddng? Crazy but convenient. Is that like a take out?

MICK

That's when they're not circumcising babies.

FATHER BOYD

That's barbaric. The Catholic Church does no such thing.

MICK

No but the Inquisition lasted four hundred years and burning women suspected of witchcraft was popular among devout Christians.

FATHER BOYD

That was in the past, lad. We're much more progressive now.

MICK

Religions are clubs, Father. Open your eyes.

FATHER BOYD

Clubs? Yer lucky I don' have one right now. I'd club ye alright and fer yer information, both me eyes are wide open.

MICK

Do you think the Creator of the Entire Universe really cares if people on this one tiny blue planet go to church, bow to the east or west, obey silly dress codes or eat kosher foods or don't use electricity or whatever foolish superstitious laws ancient, narrow-minded, self-serving committees thought of? They're just absurd, nonsensical, delusional, fact-defying, man-made rules.

FATHER BOYD

That's preposterous! How can ye say that?

MICK

George Carlin said religion is like a pair of shoes. One size does not fit all.

FATHER BOYD

Oh, he did, did he? Who the hell is George Carlin?

MICK

Mahatma Ghandi said God has no religion.

FATHER BOYD

I'll have them both excommunicated so fast -

DR LOWE

Good luck with that, Father. You see they're not -

MICK

The Gates Foundation donated a billion dollars to improve access to birth control in developing countries. It'll save millions of lives, help girls, women decide their own future -

DR LOWE

Makes sense to me but what do I know?

MICK

But birth control's against Church policy! Isn't that right?

FATHER BOYD

Aye, lad. It is.

MICK

I rest my case.

FATHER BOYD

Are ye all daft? Have ye lost yer senses?

(storms out)

That's the devil talkin! I-I need some air!

DR LOWE

Mick, can you keep a secret?

MICK

Who am I going to tell?

DR LOWE

Rumour has it, Father Boyd flogs himself at night.

MICK

Most people floss before turning in. Maybe he got the two mixed up. Whenever I feel guilty, I do sit-ups.

*(NURSE ASHLIN, 35, pretty, athletic, ENTERS. DR LOWE gives her a longing look. She moves to Mick's side.)*

NURSE ASHLIN

*(in a British accent)*

Hi Mick. I'm Nurse Ashlin. If you need anything, ring the nurse's station with this button and I'll be here ASAP.

MICK

Hi. Thanks. Nice to meet you.

DR LOWE

Nurse, I called you ten, no eleven times this week but have you bothered calling back? No.

*(to Mick)*

We're having a relationship problem.

NURSE ASHLIN

We don't have a problem because there is NO relationship.

DR LOWE

God, you're gorgeous when you're angry. Come with me to Vegas. I'll be leaving one of these days.

NURSE ASHLIN

Your accountant called. Said something about an audit.

DR LOWE

Oh no!

DR LOWE

*(LIGHTS dim as DR LOWE rushes out, almost knocks Nurse Ashlin over.)*

NURSE ASHLIN

Like a mad bull in a china shop!

## SCENE 8

*(Two hours later. LIGHTS up on MICK asleep in his hospital bed. The door is open. Busy corridor hospital sounds, moans and groans, coming from the hallway, off-stage.)*

*(FATHER BOYD ENTERS holding a large water bottle.)*

FATHER BOYD

It won't be long now, lad. Father Boyd is here to save ye.

*(BOYD makes the sign of the cross on Mick's forehead, then pours water on his face. Mick stirs awake.)*

MICK

He-hey!

*(sputters)*

Wha-what are you doing?

FATHER BOYD

Jus' helpin' cleanse yer soul, lad. I'm baptizin' ye so ye'll have a fightin' chance.

MICK

Leave me alone. I was having a great dream. Could be my last.

FATHER BOYD

Do ye reject Satan, all his works n' empty promises?

*(FATHER BOYD sprinkles more water on Mick who pushes the priest back.)*

*(DR LOWE ENTERS.)*

DR LOWE

Father, what are you doing?

FATHER BOYD

This is a spiritual matter, doctor. Please don't interfere.

*(to Mick)*

Do ye believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven -

*(DR LOWE strolls over, lunges for the water bottle. They wrestle over it.)*

DR LOWE

Drowning in a hospital bed is a physical matter, one that medically-speaking, will be tough to explain. I have enough paper work, thanks.

*(DR LOWE pulls it away from the priest and puts a hand out to block him from getting it back. They take a moment to catch their breath.)*

*(DR LOWE slam-dunks the water bottle in the wastebasket.)*

DR LOWE

What's wrong with you?

FATHER BOYD

Can't help it. I have this urge -

MICK

Said the Boston Strangler. Can I get a restraining order?

*(FATHER BOYD gets some paper towels and hands them to DR LOWE.)*

DR LOWE

Why don't you take a break and rest a while?

*(FATHER BOYD trudges back to the chair. Sits. DR LOWE dries Mick off.)*

*(A CELL PHONE rings to the tune of BEETHOVEN'S NINTH. DR LOWE turns away, steps over to the window.)*

DR LOWE

*(into his cell phone)*

Hello ... What?

*(shuts his cell)*

Something's come up. Be right back.

MICK

Wait! Don't go.

*(As DR LOWE passes by, MICK throws out a hand, grasps his arm tightly.)*

MICK

*(low)*

You can't leave me alone with that psycho. You sure he's a real priest?

*(DR LOWE tries getting away but can't)*

DR LOWE

For someone who's dying you have an awesome grip.

*(grimaces)*

Mick, you're cutting off my circulation. Your doctor's circulation. That's not healthy for either of us. Nurse Ashlin will be here in two seconds flat.

*(DR LOWE pries Mick's hand off, quickly leaves.)*

FATHER BOYD

I like to sprinkle a bit more holy water than most priests. Can't be too careful. Now that yer nice n' clean on the outside, how about we work on yer inside?

MICK

I could have drowned. Um Father, why don't you take a walk? A long one. It'll be good for my health.

FATHER BOYD

*(rises)*

If I put the fear of God in yer heart, then I've done me part.

MICK

I hear they have some great desserts in the cafeteria. I have this tremendous craving for a pound of dark chocolate.

*(FATHER BOYD strolls over.)*

FATHER BOYD

How about sayin' a small prayer with me? Come on, just a wee little prayer? I found Jesus! Ye can too. Ye'd bring a smile to this old Irishman's face.

MICK

I'm tired right now. Maybe there's something's on the tube that will bring a smile to both of us.

FATHER BOYD

Oh, so ye'd like a break, is that it?

MICK

Yeah. If you don't mind.

FATHER BOYD

Ye'll rest forever unless it's too feekin' hot! Then ye'll be squirmin' like a fish on a sharp hook n' wish ye'd listened.

MICK

Oh God. Um, Father, can I level with you?

FATHER BOYD

*(leans closer)*

Please do. I'm not here to judge, lad

MICK

Promise you won't get homicid - mad?

FATHER BOYD

In the words of our Savior, 'Let he without sin cast the first stone.'

MICK

Hope you remember that because I don't believe in religion.

FATHER BOYD

Jesus Christ! Not another feckin' atheist!

MICK

*(waves)*

Um, Father, I'm still here.

FATHER BOYD

You're me fourth one this week. A holy man of the cloth can only take so much.

*(looks up)*

Are ye testin' me, Lord? Is that it?

*(FATHER BOYD drags himself out the door.)*

MICK

*(to the audience)*

Least he didn't flip out on me this time.

*(LIGHTS dim as MICK rolls over.)*

## SCENE 9

*(The next morning. LIGHTS up on MICK sitting up in bed. NURSE ASHLIN is holding a cup of water with a straw for him to drink from.)*

MICK

Thank you.

*(to the audience)*

God, she's so cute. If I wasn't dying ...

*(NURSE ASHLIN wipes his chin and puts the cup on the bedside table. Then she checks his blood pressure.)*

NURSE ASHLIN

Your blood pressure's a bit high.

MICK

Only when you're close by.

NURSE ASHLIN

Aren't you sweet? Can I get you anything else?

MICK

Chocolate. I need chocolate. Next best thing to -

NURSE ASHLIN

*(waves a finger)*

Get some rest, Mick. I'll check in on you later.

*(Mick drifts back to sleep. NURSE ASHLIN jots a few notes on his medical chart when FATHER BOYD enters.)*

FATHER BOYD

Don't tell me he's gone.

NURSE ASHLIN

He's asleep.

FATHER BOYD

Thank God. There's still time.

NURSE ASHLIN

Please don't wake him.

FATHER BOYD

I'll just sit here quietly, say some prayers for the poor lad.