
ALLIE OOP'S LAST FANTASTIC DAY

A Solo Play
By Kirt Shineman

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SYNOPSIS:

While Sue prepares for her son's 18th birthday, she awaits important news. Meanwhile she recounts why she became Allie Oop the Clown, and how being a clown helps her battle life's difficulties.

CHARACTERS:

SUE	a late 30-somethin', mother
ROGER	(unseen) Sue's husband (A recording of nonsense sounds.)
HEE-HOO	(unseen) Sue's clown friend (Her voice is a recorded slid whistle.)
DR. CUTTER	(unseen) Sue's doctor (His voice is a recording of a tambourine and a real voice.) The voice should be SUE's but recorded.

SETTING:

The setting is a bathroom vanity with drawers, a make-up mirror, a chair in front of the vanity, a hand-held phone near the bathroom door, a dirty clothes hamper, and a toilet closet door. What bathroom where? Sue's bathroom in the United States. When? Now. Her telling never leaves the bathroom. She is aware she is telling and the audience is there being told.

Scene One: the start of school and end of summer.

Scene Two: immediately after scene one in the hospital.

Scene Three: over a few months in various treatment centers

Scene Four: the end of the school year, the start of summer.

SCRIPT NOTES:

The play is naturalistic at its core no matter what the degree of clown stylization is used. The character, her situation, the conflict, her relationships, is based on three-dimensional reality. Sue is a real person; Allie Oop is her real clown persona. Respect her. Don't judge her or her choices. Her events, her choices, her clowning should be played real, not abstract, not absurd, not experimental, but honest.

THE PLAY:

Scene One:

(We hear circus music. SUE, in pajamas and a bathrobe, walks with purpose into the bathroom, with a [cordless] phone. The phone is ringing. She holds the phone away from her like it is a baby with an atomic diaper.)

SUE

I'm going to do this first!

(The phone rings a second time. SUE looks at it like it farted and left a nasty smell.)

SUE

(Quietly to the phone) What is waiting a few more hours?

(The phone rings. SUE looks at it like it cussed.)

SUE

Shut up! (Beat. She hangs up the phone. She picks it and slams it down, or she clicks it on and turns it off.) Roger, don't you dear pick up the phone! I will when I will! Sooooo, just don't do it. If it's anything serious Miss-Have-A-Fanstastic-Day will call back!

(SUE quickly locks the door. Over the music Roger protests about SUE's decision. On the bathroom counter is a CD player; Sue turns it off – music goes out.)

SUE

Roger! Stop It! I'm fine, Mister Worry-wart. Have faith! His eye is on the sparrow. I am going to do this and then we'll see how I'm feeling, and really, I'm feeling fine. My —

(Roger mumbles from beyond the door, his mumble is a clown noise. Is the lock enough to keep him out? She drags the hamper against the door. She puts the phone on top of the hamper.)

SUE

I can't hear you? I'm getting ready! (Beat.) If you try, and stop me, you'll be eating Brussels sprouts, and corn beef hash, or cold cereal for dinner. Or I'll just take your manhood and stick it in the freezer for a month. You'll get no sex from me! (Beat. To herself in the mirror.) I will keep my promise. Even if it kills me! (Beat.) (Quietly) I will.

(Roger mumbles from beyond the door, his mumble is a clown noise.)

SUE

(Almost to herself) It's nothing. Just cramping, or constipation, or pestilence or too much cheese. (Beat) You've got nothing to worry about. (Beat) Anyway Roger you get cramps just thinking about leaving the state. (Mimicking Roger) "Ow Sue. Sue. Su-we-sue. Suuuu-iiiiieeee!" Like I'm some average pig. I'm no average pig. You think you can make me stay. But, no. I'm not waitin' around, worryin', anticipatin'. (Beat.) Let you coddle me with tea and heating pads? No way. It's Leo's first day of his last year of school. And you can't make me stay. It's Leo's senior year and his eighteenth birthday. Soooo! Allie Oop's doin' her thang. (Sung and danced) Rally! The entertainer! Bumm-bumpd-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum. (Beat. Phew, she's tired.) For me clowning's a cure. And it's got fewer side effects than an Ambien Prozac martini cocktail.

SUE

(To Roger who is on the other side of the bathroom door) Rog, are you gonna sit out there a bug me this whole time? (Beat.) You can. If you want. You could also put the cream pies in the cooler, so when Hee-Hoo gets here I'm ready. (Pause.) She's coming early 'cause she want to know what the doctor said, but the doctor hasn't said anything so I'm going to do what I've promised to do. (Pause) And this is my last chance... I mean, I've got to hurry. I've only got thirty minutes to change this mess into Allie Oop!

(Roger mumbles from beyond the door, his mumble is heard as a clown noise.)

SUE

Roger, I'm not missing it! I've always clowning on the first day of school, and it's his birthday. And his senior year, it is triply important. Doesn't matter if he's a six foot tall. Doesn't matter if he's the school Indian leg wrestling champ. Doesn't matter if he knows every Jerry Sheman or Herwoman song by heart. He's my son, and this is our—

(Roger mumbles from beyond the door, his mumble is heard as a clown noise.)

SUE

I know he's not six-feet tall. Give me credit. I may not be smart; I don't know when a book is any good, or which star is which, or the difference between a BA and a BS, but I do *know* my son. (As she pulls out her make-up) I'm not saying you don't, but... I'm as dedicated to this as much as Tom Jones was to the people of Jonestown. (As Tom Jones singing) "What's new pussycat; how about some coo-ooo-ool-aid?"

(Roger mumbles from beyond the door, his mumble is heard as a clown noise.)

SUE

Quit?! I'm not going to *quit*. I've not lost. Quit? Okay I may give up every diet I start. Only diet I've ever finished was a Diet Shasta. I quit reading the newspaper. It's got too

many words. And I quit high school. But I was pregnant with Leo. Quit him? (Shrugs.) I haven't lost. That means I've failed. Did that, and never again. I won't fail Leo... Now Leo may have failed pre-school. But that was my fault.

(SUE laughs. She speaks more to herself as she gets ready. She talks to the mirror.)

SUE

How does one flunk pre-school? His report card looked like the thermometer at the North Pole. Way below zero. So many dashes it was Morse-code: dash-dash-dot-dot-dot. All unsatisfactory. He's smart now, but then he spent so much time in time-out from the second he got to school he just moved his backpack to the corner. He spent so many months staring at the corner he didn't even know what teacher looked like! Fail preschool? All he had to know was his numbers and his alphabet, in order. Or know his colors. (She arranges the white face paint, and red and black face-sticks.) Colors like white, black, and red. The basics. He probably failed because I used to sit him in front of the TV so I could do all of the chores you required.

SUE

I didn't use the TV to baby-sit. Even Hee-Hoo says there's nothing wrong with The People's Court, the shopping channel, or PBS! It's a good way to learn. Anyway, how could I know what PBS was teachin' him. At least I didn't know until the school called. I wasn't sittin' by the phone waitin' for... news. Not that that's what I'm doing now. I'm not. You are. And where were you, Roger? I had to be the one to go and talk to the teacher.

After the school called I was the one to drive to Sunny Day—A-O-K' Pre-school, and sit in a chair for a five year old with Miss Partly Cloudy-Day towering over me?

(As Teacher) — Sue, we're sorry ... I don't know how to say this, but...

The ideas raced through my head. Did Leo bite a kid? Oh no, don't tell me he hit a girl with a bat? Did he take off all his clothes and run naked through the jungle-gym.

(As Teacher) — Sue, it's worse than that. He's color blind.

(As Sue)— Oh my Lord! No, he is not!

(As Teacher) —Yes, he is. He failed the test. There are many careers he can't do now.

(As Sue)— Can't be a painter 'cause he couldn't tell white from egg shell.

(As Teacher) — Can't be a doctor because he can't tell blood from urine.

(As Sue)— Can't be a piano player since he can't tell the difference between the black keys and the white keys! Dear no! This is horrible!

SUE

I grabbed Leo by the ear, like any mother would, and dragged him to the car. I'm old fashioned that way. I wasn't goin' to hurt him. Not in front of Miss Partly Cloudy. I'd do it when we got home. And Leo, in the car, sittin' in those birth control bucket seats we had, and I couldn't understand how our son's color blind. I drove like a spaz-demon. When I came to a stop-light, I slammed on the breaks almost makin' us fly into the next life. We sat there, and I cried. All of the beautiful colors he's never goin' to see. All the wonderful color of roses- A clown's nose! The autumn leaves... In my day-dreamin', the

stop-light changed. Leo yelled out—

(As LEO) —Mom! The light! It's green!

I burned rubber, pullin' a U-ie back to Sunny Day A-O-K Pre-school. I dragged him by the scruff of his neck, like any mother would, back into the classroom.

(As SUE)—Miss Partly Cloudy! Re-test him!

And they did! Leo wasn't color blind, just too smart for his britches. That PBS show? It'd talked about how in color blindness green was orange, and red was brown, and yellow was white. And Leo thought it'd be cool to fool the testers at Sunny Day. When I asked Leo why he did it, you know, messed up the test. And he said—

(As LEO) —'Cause.

(As SUE)—Leo? Cause why?

(As LEO) —So I'd be special. Handicapped.

(As SUE)—Why'd you want to be handicapped?

(As LEO) —So you'd notice me, Mommie.

(As SUE)—But I do notice you, Leo.

And that's when Leo, my boy, at only five years old, broke my heart. Little tears just filled his eyes. His little chin quivered, and he looked at me.

(As SUE)—You can tell Mommie.

And he cried, no sound, just tears.

(As SUE)—Leo? Why would you think I didn't notice you?

(As LEO) —'Cause Mommie. You forgot.

(As SUE)—Forgot what?

(As LEO) —You forgot. Today's my birthday.

Oh.

(As LEO) —Yeah. Miss Partridge, remembered. We had cupcakes. But you forgot. I had.

(As SUE)—Leo, let me give you the skinny on this. From here on out, I'll never miss your birthday. Never. Ever. Deal?

(As LEO) —Deal, Mommie.

(SUE returns to her vanity and begins to outline her clown face.)

SUE

Now that was a fantastic day, Roger. This is our deal. You're the one who came up with the idea. To make sure I don't ever forget it, cause "You're prone to do that." You suggested it. And this—his last year at home... You're the one who suggested I go to Florida for those six months and studied at Barnum Bailey's clown college to learn clown history, clown stunts, clown economics, clown stocks and bonds. Of course I quit, Roger, but not before I invented Allie Oop. And my clown friends are counting on me. And the cream pies! What would I tell Bam-Bam-Bimbo and Hee-Hoo? Those two hookers are from the worst little whore house in Texas. Or how would I explain canceling to Booz-O. Ever notice how she smells like a mix of Listerine and Yukon Jack? If you keep me from doing this you'll have to talk to our dearest African-American friend, Klu Klux Klown. And you better do it before they get here and cram into Hee-Hoo's purple Pinto, all show and no go, as you'd say. You explain it to the high school seniors why there are no

cupcakes and cookies. They think of us as tradition. They're looking forward to all the cakes and pies and sodas. Oh! And you'd have to explain it all to the PTA president. She's coming with her little dogs all dressed like clowns. I've told you! She's Mrs. Green Jeans.

SUE

I know, I know, you think Leo hates every minute of it. He doesn't. It's a gas! [She takes a big break and finds her breath.] Okay. Okay. How about if I make you a deal? After. I'll swing by Doctor Cutter's office. If he hasn't called back by then, after I've fulfilled my duty ... (Long pause.) Then I will be ready to know.

(Silence.)

SUE

As Allie Oop I have strength. (Beat) As her I can turn ugly things into beautiful things. I turn: (*Words in brackets are mimed nonverbally. She is clowning. She changes "pains into smiles." These need clean separation.*)

[Pain into laughter.]

[Tears into hope.]

[Silence into happiness.]

I need to stick with this.

(Silence.)

SUE

I need to trust God will take care of me. This is my chance to confirm my faith. My chance to clown with God. He gets to play with us once in a while. To see what we can take. Like the five tornados. The one's that just hit Ohio last week. See, when we break God's laws- it actually causes cycles of nature to go bazzerk. It's like we have disrupted the laws of God, so he sends natural illness, unnatural diseases, all types of disasters. It's too true. Upset God by, oh, I don't know, allowing candy-asses to serve in the Army, or skirts to run for president, or Hawaiians to immigrate. If we let those things happen we'll see natural disasters, thousands of dead birds and fish in Arkansas. We'll see the weather go crazy, major storms, flooding, earthquakes, tornados, our bodies fight us from the inside. God said so— Hosea 4. "And this has happened!" That's what it says! We're supposed to learn something. Not just pop like a balloon He's twistin' and turnin' us into somethin' amazin', so we can say, "Forgive me, Lord." And God, says, "Mercy!" And then it all stops. Until we're ready for more folly. I can't explain all of it clearly, but as Allie Oop, and through history jesters told kings the truth, in a fun way or they lost their heads. (She pulls out her wig cap and puts it on.) Bein' a clown I can take life in stride. Recognize the folly. Laugh. God's good-will may look like silly folly to us, or even like evil, or meanness- but... Matthew twenty-four, seven, "The bodies will attack each other." But he has a plan, a purpose, a point. He has to. So that even when it looks like it's all fallin' out. Like the last time...

SUE

I hadn't prepared you, Roger, or Leo, and I'm sorry. When I came out of the shower in my towel, you squealed like a skirt.

(As Roger) —Ahhh! Honey! You look like you just walked out of Schindler's List. That's what you sounded like, Rog. You're slow to notice. I could've had a sex change and suddenly you'd be like, "Honey, somethin's different." You would, Rog. Remember that time you asked what I was goin' to wear to the company Christmas party, and I said the dress I wore to Tom's Retirement. You didn't know which dress. I could've worn my go-go outfit with fringe and you'd never remember that's what I wore when you first saw me workin' at the Lucky Girl's A Go-Go. Roger? The Lucky Girl's A Go-Go? I learned to dance from a Puerto-Rican! Taught me how to cheer up the men.

(She turns on the CD to "Alley Oop". SUE dances like the go-go girl she once was.)

SUE

(singing) Oop Oop Oop Oop Oop! Alley Oop! Oop Oop Oop Oop Oop! Alley Oop! There's a man in the funny papers we all know/ He lived way back a long time ago./ He don't eat nothin' but bear cat stew,/ Well, this cat's name is Alley Oop. Oop Oop Oop Oop Oop! He's the toughest man there is alive. Alley Oop!/ Wearin' clothes from a wild cat's hide./ Alley Oop!/ Oop Oop Oop Oop Oop! (After a fast wiggle, she grabs her side in pain, but whispers.) OWWw! My go-go days are gone-gone.

(Sue turns the music off. She checks the phone.)

SUE

Ms. "Have a fantastic day" is going to call back. (With emphasis but not anger) She'll call AFTER I'VE DONE WHAT I NEED TO DO. After. But I have faith its nothing. "Have a fantastic day." Nurse practitioners are messengers, and they come in all shapes and types. Here. (Announcing) The Nurse Practitioner with good news! (SUE bounds into the room miming a scroll of great news like the "publisher's clearance house".) Yeah! (Announcing) Nurse Practitioner with not-so-good news! (SUE skulks into the room miming a scroll of mediocre news.) Ooo-lloll-ooow? (Announcing) Nurse Practitioner with horrible news! (SUE tiptoes into the room, trying to hide, and slides the scroll of bad news across the floor like it's a ticking bomb, and she runs.) Yikes! YOU'RE GONNA DIE! (Announcing) Nurse Practitioner with incomplete news! (SUE treads in, and she finds a spot, stand still, unrolls the scroll and mouths news, but stops and shrugs.) Meh!

(Hee-Hoo is heard as a slide whistle.)

SUE

Oh Hee-Hoo? You're here! You're early. Is Roger still there? (Beat.) No? Well, be my best friend and keep him away from the door. He can go get the...

(Hee-Hoo is heard as a slide whistle.)

SUE

Oh good. He's worried. Of course I understand. The check-up was yesterday. I think the pain is just cramps. But I went to get checked none-the-less. I spent thirty minutes layin' there, holdin' my breath when told to. Lettin' it out when told to. Layin' still like a mummy. And when Miss-Have-A-Fantastic-Day said I was done, and all the clicks and whirls stopped, I sat up. She patted my shoulder,

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) —Have a fantastic day. Time's a wastin', Sue. Go out! Have your last fantastic day.

Hee-Hoo, fantastic days are for goners. Was she sayin' I should pull out my bucket list? Get tickets on a celebrity cruise with Roger? I wanted to cuss at her. But I didn't. I said, "I'll pray for you." All she could say was-

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) —We'll have your results next week. The lab'll call Cutter. His office'll call you.

Hee-Hoo, Dr. Cutter is cold. Glacier hands. I told him. Freezin'! So he's started wearing leather driving gloves. Now when he touches me I expect him to say-

(As the doctor checking Sue like a race car driver) —Dynamic curves. Sleek lines. Nice chassis. Clean camshaft. Oh, a few marbles on the track. Here's the turbulence blockage. These bumps and grooves disrupt the flow of air to make you run smoothly. You're a classic. Case.

(Hee-Hoo is heard as a slide whistle.)

SUE

Oh, I know. Like a classic. Like a fantastic case! I know what the lab-tech meant. Have a fantastic week, waitin', stewin', goin' crazy wonderin', imaginin'... I'm not imaginin' the worst. I'm going through with my promise: never to forget Leo's birthday. I can't let him down. I can't.

(Hee-Hoo is heard as a slide whistle.)

SUE

You know I can't let you in. Not until I'm done. Clown Rule! (Pause.) Hee-Hoo, you know, I used to have to let Leo watch. He'd sit on the hamper. I learned if he didn't see the process ... I mean, I'd walk into this bathroom, close the door... Go in as Sue, and thirty minutes later come out as Allie Oop. And Leo freaked. He ran into the bathroom, yellin'.

(As LEO) —Mommie! What did you do with my Mommie!

Cryin', screamin', all theatrics. I don't know where he got that. Not from me. I've only missed once, Hee-Hoo. The time I was tryin' to multi-task. You know, be modern. I'd just finished my face, and powdered. At the same time I was tryin' to make cookies. For Leo's class birthday party. I'd put the all the cookies in and raced back in here to do my make-up. Rogers was already at work. Then Leo yelled from the stairs.

(LEO) —Mom! MOM! And I's like

(SUE) —WHAT?

(LEO) —MOOOOM!?

(SUE)—WHAAAAT LEOOOO?!

(LEO) —COME HERE!

(SUE) —I CAN'T!

(LEO) —OKAY!

(SUE powders her face. Clouds of face powder fill the room.) I was in the middle of powderin'. Powder fillin' the room, but it wasn't. It's smoke.

SUE

I went racin' to the kitchen, and it was filled with smoke. I grabbed a towel and opened the oven. While I was pullin' out the cookies, the towel hit the gas, catches fire. Shoooot! And I tossed the towel. Burnin' my hand. But the tossed towel flies and hits the curtains. Woosh! Rats! Right? Curtains go up in flames in seconds. So quick. And then. Swoosh! There went the cabinets! Quick! As fire can spread. I couldn't even get to the phone. So I did what every smart Mother would do. I ran. Past Leo, standin' there watchin' the kitchen burn. I ran past him screamin' like I was possessed.

(SUE)—GET THE HELL OUT! GET OUT NOW!

(SUE narrating) And I ran across the street to old man Jones. Poundin' on the door.

(SUE)—Jones! Call the fire department! JONES!

(SUE narrating) Old man Jones was hard of hearin'. Finally, Jones came to the door.

(As Old Man Jones, just staring at SUE's boobs.) —Sue. What's all the commotion?

(SUE narrating) And he wasn't lookin' at me.

(As Old Man Jones, just staring at SUE's boobs.) — Something wrong with Roger?

(SUE)—Jonesie, my eyes 're up here. And nothing's wrong with Roger. He's at work. It's my house!

(As Old Man Jones, just staring at SUE's boobs.) —Sue, what can I do for you?

(SUE narrating) I looked where he's lookin'. Bam! I was naked as a jay bird. Just my grannie panties. I squeezed by Jonesie; he still copped a feel. I went straight to his phone and dialed 911. Oh my Lord! I'd left Leo in the burnin' house. I raced back to the house just in time to see Leo come across the street with my bath robe. I mean there's smoke and flames lickin' through the windows. And there's Leo holdin' my robe.

(As LEO) —You might want this, Mom.

(SUE narrating) My boy. He's more than word can express. In my robe, half in clown make up, Leo and I watched the house go up in flames.

(As SUE)—Well, Leo, your dad's gonna be pissed.

(SUE narrating) Roger handled it pretty well. And Leo.

(As LEO) —Mom. We'll find a new one.

(SUE narrating) We did. At Goodwill. You can find some crazy clothes there. Leo said the name of the store's perfect for Allie Oop.

(As LEO) —Good will goes a long way, Mom.

(Hee-Hoo is heard as a slide whistle.)

SUE

I know, I know. Hurry up. I got this. (Putting on her costume) Makes me look like a Dip-and-Dot sales woman. Leo picked it out. Hee-Hoo, maybe he is color blind. (Beat.) Oh sure, I remember the news. "A local clown burned down her own house. She and her son watched on as all there thin's went up in smoke." We were all over the news. If Leo

hadn't brought me my robe, I'd've been arrested. Leo saved me. Roger's proud.

SUE

(She opens the white face paint.) I've only missed once Hee-Hoo. And I'm makin' it up to him. The white zinc face-paint. Thick. Spread it out. Starts as a glob, and slowly you spread it all over. Fills in the wrinkles like plaster. Covers the cracks. You know, Leo tells me, white blood cells are what attacks the bad thin's in my body. Every time I do this, I feel like I'm puttin' on my armor, to get ready, to go out there and battle pain. I'm like the white blood cells fightin'. The red. (She opens the red-face-paint.) A smile painted on. Goofy. But you can't tell what's under. That doesn't matter. It's all about —puttin' on a good face, Hee-Hoo. Red blood cells carry oxygen and nutrients. I fill in my smile with red. No lips. All. Red. A big grin like I just ate a whole cherry-rhubarb pie. My clown professor, Doctor Do-A-Lot, his brother was Doctor Doolittle, he told us to find our flaws, our faults, what we didn't like about ourselves, and exaggerate them. Like Jerri. She is fat, or what she calls "fluffy", and she hates her fat, so she exaggerates it as her clown persona. Her costume makes her so round. And her clown name is Jerri-Rigged. You'll never guess what I don't like about myself? With this make-up—

(Hee-Hoo is heard as a slide whistle.)

SUE

I do not look like the clown from IT. (As the Clown from "It".) "Kill! Me? [laughs] Oh you are priceless Brat! I am eternal, child. I am the eater of worlds, and of children. And you are next!" I'm not scary, Hee-Who. Now the clown doll in Poltergeist was scary. Or the serial killer what's-his-name who dressed as a clown for kids parties. (She puts on the wig.) And Ronald McDonald? How can you trust him? His is the happy face on a horrendous meal. Fantastic! So that's about it. Floppy shoes and... (She puts on her floppy shoes.) Just slip them on. Nose. (She puts on the nose.) And my white gloves. (She puts on the white gloves.) You can't keep Allie Oop down. Allie Oop's good will goes along way. It's Fan-Tast-Tic!

(Phone rings.)

SUE

DON'T TOUCH THAT! (Phone rings again.) I can. (On the phone) Hello? Oh, hi, Doctor Cutter. Yep, this is Sue. I's just... Yes I can come in— This mornin'? No, I can't... I've... What? No, no, no. I've got this thang. I'm goin' to my son's... It's our regular... Can't you just tell me over the— ... Come on. You're usually so straight with me... (She sinks with the news.) Well, you've never been that straight with me. Damn... Oh damn. It's... Really?... Spread?... All over? ... Oh sure. Yes, now I under... Sure... Yeah... Best... Roger'll drive me, but I might look funny. It's Allie Oops day at... Yeah. All done up. Of course. Really, I am. I'm Allie Oop! Yeah. Bye.

(SUE is so overwhelmed she can't find words. She throws the phone and collapses on the floor.)

SUE

Augh. Shit! (She drops her face into her hands.) Aww shit! (She begins to cry.) Is it better to not know? NO! Shit! Shit! Shit! “Come one sweet heart hold it together. Allie Oop’s here. She can help. Make wrongs, right. Make dull, bright. Find the joy...” I can’t. AWwww shit. Damn. Damn. Damn!

(She cries. Then with strength she stands, moves the hamper away from the door, and calls out.)

SUE

Roger? Leo? Hee-Hoo?

(The music grows as SUE unlocks the bathroom door. Fade out.)

Scene Two:

(After cleaning up the vanity, SUE lays on the table. She’s being prepped for surgery. She speaks to Doctor Cutter.)

SUE

Now, now, Doctor Cutter, relax. You’re as nervous as Miss-Have-A-Fantastic-Day. Relax. I’m here. I came as quickly as I could. You said, “Get here now.” And I did. And look. I’m fine. It’s nothing. I don’t see why you’ve scheduled the surgery for ten when I’m doing fine. We’ll get this taken care of and I’ll get back to Leo’s birthday-hyphan-first day of his last day of school-celebration. I mean, could your timing have been any worse? And talk about timing, you’ve got to do something about Miss-Have-A-Fantastic-Day out there. She can say some of the worst things. Like right when I came into ER, she was there to greet me, and she said:

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) (Very sweet) — Hi Sue.

(SUE narrating) I mean, MY LORD! It’s a hospital not a cemetery. Could she be more grim? (Mimic.) “Hi Sue.” Lord!

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) (Sad and sour) — You aren’t having such a fantastic day today are you?

(SUE) — Of course I am! Oh, you mean this? I’m Allie Oop, and I’ve got things I’ve got to do today, so let’s get a move on. (Beat.) How much time have I got?

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) (Sadly) — Maybe a month.

(SUE) — I meant for the surgery. I meant how long will it take? She’s your assistant. All she could say was:

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) — Oh.

(Making fun of Miss Fantastic) OooooHHHH? OHHH? OOooOOH? As if that made it all better? As if she hadn’t just said something so absolutely stupid and ignoring it would make it go away. I’ve tried that. It didn’t work. Obviously. And I mutter back to her:

(SUE) — How horrible!

(SUE narrating) And she was like—

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) (Innocently) — Yeah. I know. My aunt had the same thing. And she died. (Beat.) In one month she was gone.

(SUE narrating) I mean, please. So I said

(SUE) — Whoa. Wait one cotton-pickin' minute.

(As MISS HAVE-A-FANTASTIC-DAY) — I know. It sucks doesn't it? But if there's anything I can do to help..."

(SUE narrating) And then she wandered off to god-knows-where? She left Roger and I sitting there. Goodness sakes! Don't tell me I'm going to go the way of your dead aunt. And don't tell me it sucks! And then don't tell me you'll help and NEVER be there! She should be fired!

SUE

It's just a thought. (Beat.) I mean she'd be supportive, be on my side, understanding, but... I'm in this... alone. (Pause.) Oh sure Hee-Hoo and Roger are out there in the waiting room, waiting for God to answer our prayers. At least they're sharing all of the cream pies and cupcakes. Your entire waiting room will be on a sugar high all afternoon. Nothin' like a sugar crash. They'll be numb. (Beat.) Not as numb as I'm going to be after the surgery though. Hey, Doc. Can you move that light? It is right in my eyes, and you're not doing surgery on my head, although Roger might have suggested it. It's not in my head, is it Doc? And it's not like you're taking all of me. (Sung "All of Me") "All of me. Why not take all of me? Can't you see? I'm no good without them? Take my lips I'll never use them." If you take something bad out, you better put something good in. This reminds me of a joke Roger told me the last time I went through this. You wanna hear it?

SUE

The story of the amazing pig! Once there was this small town farmer who had this amazing pig. Everyone in the county knew of this farmer's amazing pig. News spread far and wide how amazing this pig was. Eventually the news reached the big city, up the big sky scraper, passed around the secretaries, spread around the lunch tables, and up to the editors of the great newspaper. They were so amazed about news of this amazing pig the editors sent their most reliable reporter to the small town. He was going to interview the farmer about his pig. When the reporter arrived he asked the farmer, "Why is your pig so amazing?" And the small town farmer said, "Well, ya' see sir, two summers ago I's plowin' out there in them fields, and as it'd just rained the week before, the ground was kinda soft. The tractor hit a soft spot and tipped over, with me still in the seat. I was trapped. Pinned like this under the tractor. And I yelled, 'Here piggy! Suuuu-iiiiieeee! Suu-iiiiieeee!' And this 'ere pig came a runnin'. He burrowed underneath me, grabbed me by my collar and pulled me to safety." And the reporter, nodding his head, was surprised a pig could do that, but not enough to make the pig "amazing". So the small town farmer continued. "And then this other time, late at night, I woke up, 'cause I smelled smoke. And when I went to the door, sure enough, the house was on fire. I grabbed my wife. Carried her to the yard. But my kids were still in the burning house. So I yelled, 'Here piggy! Suuuu-iiiiieeee! Suu-iiiiieeee!' And this 'ere pig came a runnin'. He ran in the house and pulled out my son, and plopped him on the front yard. Ran back in there and pulled out my daughter, and plopped her on the front yard, and then stood on his hind legs like he wanted a treat, and said in his most cute piggy voice, "Oink-oink-oink!" The reporter laughed and laughed, and said, "Wow. This pig's so amazing. And did that all with only

one leg?” And the small town farmer replied, “Why no sir, but an amazing pig like this you can’t eat all at once.”

(SUE laughs and laughs.)

SUE

Oh right. Count backwards from a hundred. You must be ready. One hundred. Ninety-nine. Ninety-eight. Ninety-seven, ninety-six, ninety-five... (Beat.) Hey Cutter? Don’t eat me all at once. ‘Kay? (Beat.) Ninety-four, ninety-three, ninety-two, ninety-one, ninety. Eighty-nine. Can I sing instead?

(SUE sings “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” as the lights dim, but do not go black. SUE is more and more drugged. A recording of the song grows in the short transition.)

Scene Three:

(SUE, still lies on the table, center stage, in surgery, and she hallucinates fantastical things. Under all of the action is a strangely warped circus score.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

She’s out. We’re going in. Scalpel. One clean cut. Pull it back and... My, my my. Those are some lovely intestines. And just as I thought. Polka dots of cancer. Nurse. Wipe. Pull those over. Let’s see below. What’s underneath?

(SUE pulls out long colorful scarves while DOCTOR speaks.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Dear lord. What’s not diseased? All of it. It’s all gotta come out. There’s more than I thought. She’s gonna lose it up to ... here. I need more light. Sponge? Wipe. Poor thing must’ve been living with a lot of pain. Time to do some debulking. Uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, appendix, and her intestines. This is all twisted.

(SUE turns her head to the audience.)

SUE

Twisted like a hairball? A cockroach? No. An embryo of evil? No. A crab. That’s how I imagined it. Cancer the crab. Which is ironic since that’s my “sign” too, not that I believe in that stuff. And cancer means crab. A crab. Or many different crabs. With legs. Eats garbage on the ocean floor. And they’re blood red. And the older they get the more ugly they get. Eyes on their little tentacles. And they’re slimy. Sticky from the much they live in. And when they pinch, when they grab on, they don’t like to let go. And they use their claws to eat you. Pinch and eat you. Eat your from the inside out. Eating my organs. And making more little crabs, mutating. They’re the leprosy of modern life. The way I see what I’ve got, it that I don’t have it. My corrupted organs inside me have it. And the

pollution is about to be removed.

(SUE takes out scarf with a crab on it. She lies back down and the surgery continues.)

SUE

Infected trash.

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Gall bladder.

SUE

Internal garbage.

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Ovaries.

SUE

Toxic Mess.

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Cut out the uterus.

SUE

Contamination.

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Hope we can save some of this.

SUE

Pollution.

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

We're gonna have to create a colostomy. She'll need to get nutrition somehow. Boy, she's filled with it. Riddled in fact.

(SUE pulls out deflated balloons. She blows them up and turns the balloons into twisted designs while DOCTOR speaks.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Nurse, can you move that light over? I need more... Good. Suction. Sponge. Somebody. The room is getting too warm. We need it cold in here. Watch her blood pressure. She sure is bleeding in here. Those buggers were holding on tight. They sure wanted to get their hold. Scalpel. Clear the way so I can cut over... Right. Your hand is in my way. And put those over in the ... Good. What is....? Oh my God. Not more over there.

Nothing like isolated. If you ever hear me complaining about – What? Her blood pressure is dropping. How's her oxygen? Keep it flowing. Nurse, talk to me. Talk to me. Keep the air blowing on my... that's better. Okay. Make an incision there. Cut out all of this... good. Now place some of her over there. And... Good. All of her lower and most of her upper intestines... she doesn't want to keep these. Another pint of blood, Nurse. Well stay on it. She's bleeding a lot. Over there. Sponge. She'll have to re-learn how to do all of this. Bowel movements will never be the same.

(SUE sits up on the table. An EKG [heart-beat] monitor beeps out her heart rate. SUE goes to the vanity table and extracts a bubble bottle and a bubble making wand. She makes bubbles. A bright light shines from off stage right at her.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

A lot of blood. I don't know where it's coming from. She just filling up. And we don't have all of the cancerous masses out. We need to get them out before we can... Wipe. I can't see if you don't... Sponge. Okay, there's another bleeder over there. You need to seal that off. Close that up or we're going to lose her. Oh shit-shit-shit! What the hell is that? I know what it is, but was that the mass that showed up... Okay that's the mother-load there. Get it out of there, and seal it off.

(SUE makes beautiful bubbles and moves closer to the bright light. The EKG monitor beeps slower and slower.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Where is all of the blood coming from? We've got to stop the bleeding. How many pints have we used? Thirty-four! She's bleeding to death! It's just pouring out of her and we can't find the holes. We got to plug the holes! Let me see her hips. Move everything out of the way and let me see her hip-bones. Just keep sponging, and let me see her... Wipe. Okay, there there there it is. She's pouring blood out her hips. We've got to plug them up. We don't have enough of those du-dads. Nurse, go out to the cork board and sterilize some of those flat thumb-tacks. Ten. Twenty of them. And... I said so. Flat thumb-tacks! Yes! Twenty of them. And make sure they're sterilized or we're gonna have more problems on our hands!

(The EKG "flat-lines". SUE falls like a puppet whose strings were cut.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

What did I say!? Everyone stand aside. We've got to restart her. Classic case. Come on Sue. Don't quit on me now. I'm not going to let you. You've still got some clowning in you left. Ready? Charge. Go!

(SUE's body bounces on the floor like an explosion)

blew up in her chest. Then she is still. Silence. SUE doesn't get up.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Again. Charge it again. Is the god-damn thing charging? Come on! NURSE! I NEED THOSE TACKS! Stand back. Ready? Go!!

(SUE's body bounces on the floor again. Then she is still. Silence.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

SUE! Don't do this to me! Start! God-damn it! START!

(SUE sits up. She begins to do a tight-rope act on an invisible tight rope toward the light.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

She's back. Now get me those... I said twenty tacks. They better be clean. They sterile? Better be. Push them in there. And there. And one over here. Good. Stopping most of the bleeding. Stopping. We've got some more over here.

(SUE walks a tight rope and a spot light coming from the vanity, a bright flashlight on the vanity or on the make-up box. SUE walks to the WHITE LIGHT.)

SUE

Hey? Leo? Is that...

(LEO) —Yeah. Hey Mom?

(SUE) —Yeah Leo?

(LEO) —You made a promise. Don't forgot. My birthday.

(SUE) —Leo, I told you. I'll never miss your birthday. Never. Ever.

(LEO) —That was our deal, Mom. So what are you doing?

(SUE) —I'm clowning for your birthday. (Beat.) Right? (Beat.) Aren't I?

(LEO) —Not here. You still have so much more to do. Could you take a U-ie?

(SUE) —That would be nice, but I think I'm done. (Beat.) You want me to turn around?

(SUE turns around on the tightrope and walks away from the white light.)

(SUE) —Is this better, Leo?

(LEO) —Yeah Mom. Much better.

(SUE continues making bubbles.)

DOCTOR CUTTER (recorded)

Ahhh, there we go Sue. There we go. We've got the bleeding under control. Can we get a few more pins? Put one there. Over there. She's going to feel so much better. We're going to have to write this one up for JAMA. Thumb-tacks! (His voice fades out.)

Another one goes there. Sue you've got a lot of strength. You're gonna ... Let's sew up this section. Close up this.

(The lights fade as the DOCTOR's voice diminishes.)

Scene Four:

(SUE is still in her Allie Oop outfit.)

SUE

Surgery was ... I got through it. "A pig like this..." (Pause.) But the chemo. Here is how I saw me during chemo. I've learned to see it. Before... I didn't see it. I ignore it. Now? I see ... cancer. But how I see ... me. Okay. When I visualize me with and without cancer. (Pause.) When I see me with it... I see ... in the middle of me... a blackish-bluish blob. (She touches the pom-pom on her clown costume.) A large cancer cell. And it spreads. It spread. These spots, colorful. Insidious. Cells. Spread. I had five different kinds and didn't even know it. This one is my colon cancer. This one – my cervical cancer. Rectal cancer. Ovarian cancer here. Gall bladder cancer – this one. And this one is my breast cancer. Which I don't have, but I'm looking out for. Oh, here. My green cancer. I'm not sure what that is, but it's green. They all grow in their own way. They all take up space, inside me. They take over everything.

(As she removes the polka-dotted clown costume, and is left standing in her undergarments.)

SUE

And... they... leave... me... (She stands in her white t-shirt and white or black long shorts.) Blank. A new piece. Blank. White. And blank. A container of disease. A patient. Going every day to chemo was ... as if they were running bleach through this container. Rinsing me out.

(SUE sits in the chair as if she's getting chemo.)

SUE

And every day I went to chemo, in the afternoon, Leo would show up, after school, and sit with me. We'd go over his studies. We'd spend the time helping him with his homework. I practically knew his Astronomy course as well as he did. And the laws of physics? I learned them too. Oh, and did I tell you? Chemo sucks. A positive attitude? It doesn't help.

(SUE takes off her clown wig.)

SUE

(SUE to LEO as she is receiving a chemo-drip.) There's lots of F's in physics. But if you ace this test you have a four point "O". Force equals mass times acceleration. Repeat it after me. F equals M. A.

(LEO) — F equals M. A.

(SUE narrating) He'd come a long way from being color blind and failing pre-school. And I'd come a long way from the trailer park and go-go dancing.

(SUE) — Leo, you know, I've always wanted more for you. More than I had. Well, better than I had. And... I've always wanted you to have it easier. This year hasn't been ... easier.

(LEO) —For you especially.

(SUE) —Or for you. And I want you to know... it's not been easy. Raising kids is never easy. I made mistakes.

(LEO) —Like the fire?

(SUE) —Yeah. But all I could think of was you. How you needed to get out of the house and I needed to get the fire department. How the only thing on my mind was your safety, your birthday, my promise.

(LEO) —Is that why you avoided going to the doctor for so long?

(SUE) —Kind of. But mostly it's cause I didn't want to face the fact that I might just lose you. That I'd not be around. And I'd lose you that way. It's scary to lose you. It's scary to be ill, to have something so wrong with you, yet you can't do anything about it, and it could mean the end of your life, but what scared me the most was not losing my life, but losing you. Leo, it's so tough to lose a child, to lose you would kill me. I love you so much. You'll never know how much it hurts to think I could lose you. I could give up every part of my body for you. Go through it all again, but if it was you, I'd take it all for you. It's easier for me to go through it than to imagine you going through it. That's how much I love you. That's how much I wanted to... I don't know. I'm not making any sense. But someday... someday... maybe you'll understand. God I hope you do. But it doesn't matter right now. Just know I love you.

(LEO) — I know Mom. I know. (Pause.) God, I love you too. (Pause.) And I don't ever want to see you go through that again. It would kill me.

(SUE) —That's what this chemo's for. Right.

(LEO) —You're some kind of force Mom.

(SUE) —F equals M. A.

(SUE removes her make up. She fixes her hair and face for a more regular outing.)

SUE

I finished chemo. First thing I ever finished. They don't let you quit that, do they Allie? "No way!" These last few months have been ... rough. Even with my chemo Leo's fighting daily with Roger. Why is that? As they get closer to leaving they rebel more, they argue more, they try every boundary. Last weekend he comes in at two a.m. and he comes in the house, Roger and I sound asleep, and when he entered the house at two a.m. Leo yelled from the stairs.

(LEO) —Mom! MOM!

(SUE) — (tired) WHAT?

(LEO) —MOOOOM!?

(SUE) — (sleepy) WHAAAAT LEOOOO?!

(LEO) —COME HERE!

(SUE) — (with a yawn) I CAN'T!

(LEO) —OKAY! (Beat.) I'M DRUNK MOM! LIKE REALLY DRUNK!

(SUE narrating) It was like he was a sorority girl telling the whole frat house "Come and rape me!" And then he ran into his bed room door. Remind him later: open doors before walking into them. Roger asked me if I was going to do anything about it, and I said, "Of course. But not now." (Pause.) In the morning bright and early I banged on Leo's bedroom door.

(SUE) — Waky, wakey.

(LEO) — But Mom.

(SUE) — Leo, we don't mind you drinking on a Friday night, but there are responsibilities we all have. You can have fun as long as you take care of your responsibilities. So, Leo today we're making bread for the Goodwill bake-off. And we started making bread. Lots of bread. The smell of yeast after a night of drinking? Lots of yeast? We're kneading the bread—

(SUE) — So Leo, how was the show choir party?

(LEO) — (nauseous) It... We... They were... Um.... (Almost throwing up) It was...

(SUE) — (really loud) Are you feeling okay?!

(LEO) — Fine. I'm... fine. Just... not... Mom? Excuse me.

And he races off to the bathroom and runs into the door. And vomits all over the door. "Open the door!" At least he's doing it now. Getting it out of his system before his freshman year. He's going off to college to be—guess what? Not a doctor. Not a nurse. A family therapist. Yeah right, that's what I thought. He'll be busy. (Beat.) Curing on himself. (Beat.) Kidding. But ... he's already got acceptance into a few really big schools. I've learned the difference between a BA and a BS and the difference between State and Private universities. And the difference between John Hopkins and Boston State. He'd been workin' on it all last year, but ... he's gonna stick close and stay in-state. Did I tell you he's still moving into the dorms. Next August. With Leo leaving home there will be some ... Roger and I'll ... It'll be different.

(She has her make up re-done, and she looks like she's ready to go out for the day, except she's still in her undergarments.)

SUE

Mostly 'cause now I am special. Handicapped. And Roger's struggling with survivor syndrome. He's not sleeping well. Drinking more. Staying around the house more. He will get over it as I find a way to deal with all of it too. But he's been a big help. Especially with this.

(SUE pulls off her t-shirt and on her left side is an ostomy "wafer".)

SUE

It's permanent. My ostomy single bag system. My other bag's a Prada. They call it an appliance. Like a dishwasher, dryer, or vacuum. But with this I know exactly what I'm made of. Contents: Gulf of Mexico seafood and Starbucks coffee. Once in a while Roger helps. The strangest was ostomy massage. He'd help me massage my hole. Help me learn

to control it like my other hole, which is basically out of order. Learning ostomy control has been tough. The gas. I've got the charcoal kind, which helps with farts. Some of my challenges now are appetite, having phantom rectum feelings, pouch disposal, and showering. Now I spend more time than ever in the bathroom. Miss-Have-A-Fantastic-Day told me, "You can't wear a bikini but eventually you can swim. If you want to." So Roger and I have planned a celebrity cruise. I can eat almost anything I want, but I do know which ones cause more gas than others, which ones are harder to pass than others. Etcetera. You don't need to know all of that.

(She pulls a dress out of the hamper. She puts on the dress and high heel shoes.)

SUE

And blow-outs! Ever have this happen? You're driving the freeway and your tire blows-out? My kind of blow-outs are nothing like that. Let me just say: I never leave the house without a change of clothes and an extra appliance. Course it means I don't have to worry so much about lasting through long meetings or car trips without a restroom break. And now when Leo gets mad at me and says "Mom you're being such an asshole." I point out how untrue he really is. Now, sometimes, the cramping is the stop-you-in-your-tracks kind. Takes the wind out of you. Thank goodness we don't have an outhouse. I have plans. I'm going to get back into clowning at the children's ward. Not right away. I've got some healing to do. I've also joined the Colon Club. A bunch of us speak to various groups like you, and... and... encourage others. I am always happier when I have clowning plans. Living as a clown is like living an alternative reality. You are out of time, it is a kind of transport.

(SUE puts on a black graduation robe and mortarboard hat.)

SUE

An honorary degree. Principle Greenjeans asked the school board if they could, you know, do that, an honorary high school diploma. For all I'd done for the kids through the years. They pulled my transcript from high school. I wasn't really missing too many class credits. The whole gang is coming. Miss Partly Cloudy and Doctor Cutter will be there. All of my clown friends. Even Hee-Hoo... Hee-Hoo's who? Her real name is Ellen Wo. And we're going to Ellen's family's Chinese restaurant afterwards, to celebrate. Woo! I think I'm ready. But today. Today I'm going to school as me. Allie Oop has had her last fantastic day. Except the nose. (She puts on the red nose.) Otherwise most of the kids won't recognize me. (Beat.) I'm going to celebrate Leo's graduation, his last day in high school. This will be our fantastic day. Together.

(The music transitions into Pomp and Circumstance as the lights fade to black.)

(End of Play.)