



Lullaby

Joan O'Sullivan

CAST

Frannie
Hank
Al
Mary

} Art students
Six months pregnant

(The stage is divided into two distinct areas. To the left is a balcony attached to a small tavern. A wooden railing surrounds the porch and a corrugated fiberglass roof covers it. In the back wall are windows, through which one can see inside the tavern dimly, and steps and a door leading inside. Tables and chairs are scattered around the floor.

At stage right is the living room of a small apartment furnished with overstuffed chairs and mismatched furniture. There are paintings, sketches and pieces of sculpture scattered around the room which are incongruous with the larger pieces. Off stage right are the other rooms and the front door.

As the scene opens the apartment is in half light, but the balcony is illuminated by the afternoon sun of later summer. Two couples are seated toward the back of the balcony, quietly talking, as Fran, Hank and Al enter carrying steins of beer and take a table near center front of the balcony. They sit and drink silently, staring out over the balcony at the view.)

Fran: She's still down there. Still in her garden—just like she'd been there all summer.

Al: Her tomatoes look pretty good. Looks like the beans are all gone, though.

(pause)

Hank: Wonder what she does in the winter.

Fran: Cooks all the stuff she raised. Makes raspberry pies or something.

(pause)

Hank: Can Mary cook?

Fran: Not very well. She made fried chicken once. She burned up a towel of mine trying to put out the grease fire she started in the oven.

Al: Gee, I'll bet she's really a *swell* housewife. Probably uses all of Heloise's Hints.

Hank: Probably sends them in.

(pause)

Al: Hey, Fran, do we really have to go over there? What if she cries or something.

Hank: Yeah, Fran. Pregnant people always cry easily. Especially if they don't want to be pregnant.

- Fran: Hey you guys aren't going to chicken out on me too, are you? What kind of friends are you anyway? She won't cry—that was only last spring when she first found out about it. She must be used to it by now.
(pause)
Besides, she and George love each other—she can't be all *that* unhappy.
- Al: Poor old George never knew what hit him.
- Hank: That's love for ya'. Sneaky.
- Al: Yeah. Too bad Mary won't get to finish though. She was really doing good stuff in portrait class at the end of the semester last spring.
- Hank: Yeah, she had talent all right. But stupid. You know? Really dumb. Scatterbrained. Lots of fun, but dumb.
- Fran: Well, at least George will get to finish. I was really surprised at his parents for doing that for him. Never can tell what they'll do in a clutch.
- Hank: Can't tell what anyone will do in a clutch. Like I never though George'd really go through with the marriage bit.
(pause)
- Al: What a joke, you know? What a real joke. Can you see George as a father? George?
- Hank: Can you see Mary as a mother?
- Fran: Poor kid.
- Al: Which?
- Fran: The new one. Well, maybe the three of them will all grow up together.
(pause)
God, I hope so, anyway.
(pause)
- Al: Look at all those crazy cars down there.
All those guys risking their necks like that just to rush home to their six room Valhalla in Fair Oaks Suburban Development.
- Hank: And the little women who'll start nagging them the minute they walk in the door.
- Fran: And the sweet little kiddies who'll fight straight through supper until they finally give up and go to bed.
- Al: And the barking dog.

- Hank: And the TV dinners.
- Fran: And the TV!
- Al: Marriage must really be a wonderful thing, huh, guys?
- Hank: It's a zoo—just like the rest of the world. Come on, let's get this over with if we're going. (They leave as the lights fade out on the balcony and fade up on the apartment. Mary enters, humming softly, with a vase of large, bright paper flowers which she places on a table in the middle of the room. She moves about straightening pillows, emptying ash trays, picking up newspapers. When she is finished she sits in the sofa and begins to light a cigarette, but changes her mind. She jumps up and pulls several bags from behind an armchair. Sitting on the couch, she opens them one by one and pulls out different articles of baby clothing. She spreads these carefully on the sofa around her, then picks up a pair of satin booties and examines them minutely. While she is doing this, the doorbell rings. She runs to the button on the wall and buzzes back, then hurriedly stuffs the clothes back into their bags and stashes them behind the armchair again. As she finishes there is a knock on the door.)
- Mary: Come on in, guys. (Fran, Al and Hank enter right. As Fran hugs Mary, the boys stand awkwardly at the door.)
Frannie dear! You look great! How *are* you? Well, don't just stand there, you silly boys—come in! Is this all that came? Where's the rest of the group?
- Hank: Well, everybody was pretty busy today—since it's the first day and all. They said to tell you hi, though, and that they'll be around soon.
- Mary: Well, come on. Sit down people. You just don't *know* how good it is to see you. This place has been an absolute *morgue* all summer. George and I almost went crazy. And there were all kinds of tourists and strangers down at the City View, so we didn't even go there. Which reminds me—how about a beer? All we can afford is Blatz, but. . .
- Fran: Oh, thanks, Mare, but we just had one. We stopped in at the CV after class for a minute.

- Mary: Oh. Well, you can stand another one, can't you? Hank?
Al? Don't tell me you guys are turning down free beer!
I don't believe it!
- Al: No, that's ok, Mary. . . but thanks anyway.
- Mary: Well, ok. If you say so.
(pause)
Well, how was the first day of classes? As wild as the last one?
- Hank: No, it was really a drag. Hardly anyone's back this year.
They're all new people.
- Al: Yeah, but some of them are *really* good—did you see that girl in portrait class? With the short blond hair? *Really* good stuff she was doing.
(pause)
Uh, I saw George for a minute this morning, Mary. I didn't get to talk to him though—I guess he was in a hurry.
- Mary: Oh, he doesn't talk to anybody anymore—no time. Not even me. He gets off work at ten-thirty and goes straight to bed 'cause he's so tired. I don't know what he'll do when he has to start studying. Good thing he only has one year left.
- Hank: Yeah, well, the baby will keep him awake, anyway.
(pause)
- Fran: How are you, anyway, Mary?
- Mary: Oh, jut fine, unfortunately. Healthy as a mother hippo, as my dear husband says. That's in reference to the fact that I've already gained twenty pounds and the kid isn't due until the end of November. George says not to give up hope yet, though.
- Al: Hope for what?
- Mary: Oh, he thinks maybe I'll fall down the stairs or something fun like that. He makes me carry the groceries up and we do all kinds of fun exercises and stuff, too. But nothing works.
(silent pause)
- Hank: Hmmmm. *That* certainly is different.
- Mary: So's my condition.
(pause)
You know, our luck is simply amazing. Just amazing. I read that the pill is considered to be 99.9% safe—like it

works for 999 women out of a thousand. So who does that one percentage point turn out to be? Me, Naturally. With our luck we're bound to have at least twins.

(pause)

Fran: I really like your apartment. You've done a lot with it. Did you make the flowers?

Mary: Yeah. That's about all we have money for—I mean I can't afford canvases and stuff because we're always running out of money anyway. Pretty soon I won't have time even for paper flowers, though, so it really doesn't matter, I guess.

Fran: Is your mother coming out to help you or anything?

Mary: Ha. No, I rather doubt that she'll make it. She isn't too hot on the grandmother bit anyway. Makes her feel old or something.

(pause)

Hank: What's the kid's name going to be? Got it all figured out already, I'll bet.

Mary: Well, as a matter of fact we haven't made the final decision yet. It's a toss-up between Fluke, Mistake and Long-Shot.

Hank: Hmmmmm. Yes, I'd say you do have a problem.

Al: I've always been partial to family names, myself. I was named after my great uncle—a circuit court judge, no less.

Fran: Very impressive, Al. I'm sure he'd really be proud to know you're carrying on his name in such grand style.

Al: Oh, he does. He's ninety-two. Just wrote me out of his will, as a matter of fact. "If you won't cut that hair, I'll cut you, Boy," he said. And he did.

Fran: Yeah, family names can get messy that way.

Hank: Gives the kid so much to live up to and all.

Mary: A social stigma. That's what George said.

(pause)

Fran: By the way, Mare, how's your cooking coming? Been cooking much fried chicken?

Mary: Well, no. Not recently, anyway. We spend an awful lot of money on food. 'Course' George drinks about a gallon of milk a day. Certainly hope the kid doesn't take after him—I hate to wash dishes.

(pause)

Oh, yeah—the food. Well, George cooks sometimes, and it's pretty good then. And sometimes we go out for hamburgers and stuff. And when I cook. . . George says I should cook all the time—like if I eat all my own cooking we won't have to worry about the kid anymore. He may have a point there, too.

Hank: Sounds like you're really a gourmet, Mary. What's your specialty—hot dogs?

Mary: No, I always undercook those. Let's see—it's not spaghetti, 'cause that always comes out pasty, and it's not eggs, 'cause they're always greasy. Hmm. I must have one. I guess I'd have to say peanut butter and jelly on rye. I really make a *mean* peanut butter sandwich. Just happened to have a few lying around if you'd care to try one, Hank. I like to keep a few on hand for our guests, because they always ask for them, you know.

Hank: Oh, well. . . I'd really like to Mary, but, uh. . . it might spoil my supper. Maybe next time, ok?

Mary: Well, ok, Hank, but you just don't know what you're missing. It's strawberry jelly, too.

(pause)

That's really a great dress, Fran. Did you get it in the Village?

Fran: Yeah, just a few weeks ago. There's a new shop on Greenwich Street.

Mary: You don't *know* how I missed New York this summer. Cincinnati's ok in the winter, but it was really hell this summer.

(pause)

I thought about going home for a while, but George didn't think it was too good an idea with my mother the way she is now.

(pause)

The thing she really minds about the most is the wedding. 'Cause we didn't have it in a church or anything. I don't know why it should matter to her if it didn't to us, though.

(pause)

She never writes or anything.

Fran: She might change when the baby comes, though, Mary. Babies do that to people.

- Mary: Yeah, maybe she'll like it so much she'll want to keep it.
That'd solve all our problems.
(pause)
Well, it was just a thought.
(pause)
Know anybody who wants to buy a baby? We'll give them a good buy.
- Hank: You'll change too, Mary. And George. Wait'll you see it for the first time. You'll feel. . .
- Mary: Nothing. That's just what I feel right now. Nothing. I'm supposed to be all radiant and expectant and happy, right?
Well, I'm not. And I don't care if I never even see it.
- Al: Well, why the hell are you having it, Mary? God, you can't be *that* stupid. Why didn't you get rid of it a long time ago? There are ways, you know. George knows too. It isn't fair to the kid, you know. It really isn't.
- Mary: (jumping up) That's just it! George! That's exactly it, Al. George wouldn't let me do anything after I told him. He wouldn't let me take anything or see anybody or anything. I wanted to, but he said this was the only thing to do.
(pause)
It wasn't me. God, I don't want a baby. I don't want one ever!
(Fadeout no apartment. After a moment, fade up on balcony. It is the same evening. Fran, Al, and Hank are seated as before, smoking and drinking steins of beer.)
- Hank: I need another one. How about you guys?
- Al: Yeah.
- Fran: Ok. (Hank leaves.)
(pause)
I should go home and eat supper.
(pause)
I don't think I could.
(pause)
Al, what's she going to do to that poor kid? I mean, she could really kill it or something. She'll kill it with hate if not anything else, the dumb bitch.
(pause)
- Al: Stewed tomatos.

Fran: What?

Al: Stewed tomatos. They're having stewed tomatos for dinner.

Fran: Who?

Al: The garden lady. Down there—third window in on the right.

Fran: She'll probably serve them all winter. Her husband will get sick of them.

Al: Start a fight.

Fran: She'll cry.

(pause)

I'm never getting married, Never.

(Fade to half light on balcony. Fade up on apartment.

Mary is sitting on the couch with her shoes off, drinking a bottle of beer. She hums softly. She begins to chuckle then laughs out loud. She recites the following melodramatically.)

Mary: 'Nothing. I feel absolutely nothing. I don't care if I never see it. (laughs and addresses her stomach) Oh, that's really funny, huh friend? Sorry to talk about you like that, dear, but we mustn't let them suspect. Mustn't let George suspect. Not even *suspect*.

(pause)

Ha. And poor Mother. (sadly and wistfully) 'She never writes or anything.' No, but she calls twice a week, doesn't she, dear? What a coach. Well, we caught the prey; now all we have to do is wait for the right moment for the reconciliation of the estranged mother and daughter and we'll all be happy again. Even your poor daddy will be happy. He'll come around to liking you soon enough. And once he starts making lots of nice money we'll like him more, won't we?

(pause)

Your poor daddy. If he ever had an *inkling*. . . (She finishes her beer and starts for the kitchen. As she goes she sings the tune she has been humming.)

Hush-a-by, don't you cry

Go to sleep, little baby.

When you wake, you shall have

All the pretty little horses. . . .