

Manhattan Repertory Theatre Presents:

TIMOTHY AND MARY

by

Sam Robson

**with Timothy Samberg
and Mary Rykov-Samberg**

Directed by Sam Robson

The Cast

TIMOTHY SAMBERG	Johnny Culver
MARY RYKOV-SAMBERG	Carole Dell'Aquila
5AM	Tamar Toledano

The Setting

New York City, 2013

Meet the Playwright



Sam Robson is an Iowa-born writer and oral historian living in New York City. A 2014 graduate of Columbia University's Oral History M.A. program, Sam transforms oral history interviews into literary narratives. He works with individuals, families, and institutions to create oral history-based books and stories. Much of his current work involves interviewing people with dementia. His play *Timothy and Mary* is based on some of these interviews.

Meet the Cast



Johnny Culver is the managing director of New York's Equity Library Theater, which presents a semi-annual festival of new short plays by American writers, in association with the New York Public Library. Favorite New York roles: Clinton Preminger in *Nude with Violin*, Heck Tate in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Mr. Jackson in *Talking Pictures*. He has directed students of HB Studios and Circle in the Square Theater School. His plays have been performed in New York and Philadelphia.



For **Carole Dell'Aquila**, a fruitful early career in theatre and commercials was followed by an equally fruitful family life. Carole is so happy to be back on the boards full time and hopes to get that *Law & Order* credit behind her soon! Favorite recent workshops have included roles in plays by Sarah Treem. A sampling of earlier work: Laurey in *Oklahoma*, *Fantastiks*, *Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Same Time Next Year*, *Generation*, *Play it Again Sam*, *Mame*. In her "gap years," she was often Mable or Phyllis, or Rose Maybud, etc., in a NYGASP (NY Gilbert & Sullivan Players) or Blue Hill Troupe production. Being the first to do a role is always special, and *Timothy & Mary* is no exception.



Tamar Toledano is grateful to be a part of telling this important story in *Timothy and Mary*. A recent graduate of the William Esper Studio, Tamar most recently starred as Margo in *Up To Date* at the Corner Office Theater. In addition to acting, she also writes and performs her own material at open mics around town. Tamar would like to thank Goddess, her friends, and all the people who believe in her.

BENJAMIN AND MARY

A Play in One Act

by

Sam Robson

with Benjamin Samberg and Mary Rykov-Samberg

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Cast of CharactersBenjamin Samberg:

A man in his mid 60s.

Mary Rykov-Samberg:

A woman in her mid 60s; wife of Benjamin.

Sam:

A man in his mid 20s.

Scene

Two Manhattan apartments

Time

Two years ago

SETTING:

We gaze through invisible windows at two very different East Village apartments. On stage right, we see a living room in the apartment of BENJAMIN SAMBERG. Jagged piles of books, European films, and documents dot the floor. A small table with a glowing lamp sits a short distance right of center stage; on its left sits a wooden chair topped with a donut cushion, and on its right is a short stool. Upstage right there is a bookshelf populated by paperbacks, on top of which sit two trophies. On stage left we see a living room in the apartment of MARY RYKOV-SAMBERG, which is well-organized, with brightly-colored, abstract art hanging from the walls and a half-finished painting resting on an easel at downstage left, with a chair behind it. Upstage and slightly to the right is a full-length couch.

AT RISE:

In his apartment, BENJAMIN sits facing 5AM, BENJAMIN in the chair and 5AM on the stool. In her apartment, MARY sits leaned back on her sofa, having a lip-synced conversation on her cell phone with a friend.

(BENJAMIN and MARY never look at each other. Initially, 5AM pays exclusive attention to BENJAMIN.)

5AM

(enters the room, sits, hits record on the audio recorder)

And we are recording. This is 5am, here with Benjamin Samberg in his apartment on May 14th, 2013. This is the first of two interviews today—later I will be visiting Mary Rykov in her studio. Benjamin, to start things off, why don't you tell me a bit about your childhood.

BENJAMIN

I'm sorry, what was your name again?

5AM

(laughs)

Oh. My name is 5am. Remember? That's the time I was born. My parents were creative types.

(pause)

So. Can you tell me about your childhood?

BENJAMIN

I don't know how to answer that. I mean, I was born in Manhattan in 1945?

(pause)

My biological father was killed in a Navy explosion one month before I was born?

(pause)

My stepfather came into the picture when I was seven years old, at which point we moved to Long Island. I grew up with my mother, my stepfather, my younger sister, and my mother's parents, all crammed in one house. I'm not sure where to go with this.

5AM

Sure, sure sure. Can you describe your home in Long Island? What did it look like?

BENJAMIN

(trying to think)

There was an upstairs and a downstairs?

MARY

(to the audience)

Ben is a wonderful man. God help us if we couldn't communicate.

5AM

What did your father do? Do you call him your—

BENJAMIN

He was a salesperson, then an executive in a paper firm. He had a tremendous, rageful temper.

5AM

Is there a specific instance when he was full of rage that sticks out in your memory?

BENJAMIN

One that sticks out is that I dented the car, and I was petrified and my mother was petrified. When he got up and started to yell, I started to scream that I was leaving.

(MARY walks downstage.)

BENJAMIN (cont.)

And my mother said she was leaving. That's the scene that stays in my mind.

MARY

I'm Mary Rykov, now married, Mary Rykov-Samberg. I grew up in suburban, white, middle-class Detroit. We lived near a golf course, and an amusement park with a Ferris wheel, and an ice-skating rink, and a wooded area. Dad was a child of the Depression—he worked for Ford Motor Company as an executive.

5AM

(to BENJAMIN)

Tell me about your mother.

MARY

Mom sewed and cooked and cleaned and, technically, raised the kids. My father didn't help at all around the house, and my English grandmother was always in the basement teaching piano. Mom was always wallpapering or painting the walls.

BENJAMIN

I don't have too many memories of my mother, even though she was around all the time.

MARY

(picks up a paintbrush from the easel)

I remember when Dad would break dishes. Sometimes he was really mad because he had a germ phobia. So if a cat walked down the kitchen counter where you cut things or where you serve food, he took the dishes and smashed them all over the floor. I remember hiding in the closet once, wishing he wasn't around anymore.

BENJAMIN

She was afraid of my father—my stepfather—as everyone else was. She was infantile, suffocating. If she had an appointment, my stepfather would have to take her there so she wouldn't get lost.

5AM

Did you think a lot about your own anxiety?

BENJAMIN

I don't know why, but when I was seven I was walking around the schoolyard wanting to be dead. Then at twelve I was crying at camp and wanted to be dead. Yes, to answer your question, I was aware of my anxiety, but more so my depression.

MARY

I was the rebel in the family. During my adolescence I experimented with drugs and alcohol, and boys came later. I snuck out of the house, ran away from home. I was my father's worst nightmare. He was an Old-World, macho guy, who thought his daughters should become secretaries or teachers, or nothing if not a housewife.

(retreats behind easel to paint)

5AM

How did other members of your family relate to your depression?

BENJAMIN

I remember speaking to the family doctor about being unhappy. I was two hundred fifty pounds at the age of twelve. They were concerned, I guess.

5AM

How does it feel now, talking about it?

BENJAMIN

I've talked about it so many times in so many groups, it's fine, it's fine.

5AM

What was school like for you?

BENJAMIN

Which school? High school?

5AM

Why don't we start in elementary school, if you can describe—

BENJAMIN

Oh, elementary school. I was picked on. Even in elementary school I didn't feel comfortable around girls. My friends ended up going to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, all very prestigious. Going to Penn State was not. I did transfer to Brown, but later on I found out it was my stepfather's connections that got me in. But I'm skipping around. I was on the basketball team, junior varsity. My friends were varsity.

5AM

What memories do you have of basketball?

BENJAMIN

(pauses, then smiles for the first time)

Well, I *loved* basketball. We had a basket outside one of the houses and we played basketball all day long. Of course I can't play anymore, but I still watch it.

5AM

That's great! You mentioned you went to summer camp as well?

BENJAMIN

(reverts to an exaggeratedly dismal tone)

Yeah, my parents would get rid of me in the summers. The irony of it is that—you can see them up on the bookshelf—I got two trophies. One for the most liked camper and one for good cheer. I was miserable! I didn't have a girlfriend—dances at the camp were torture. The memory I have is when my parents visited they would leave and say goodbye over and over again as they walked away.

MARY

I became more comfortable as an invisible person than as a visible person.

(BENJAMIN and MARY hug themselves
unconsciously. 5AM glances over
BENJAMIN'S shoulder at MARY.)

5AM

Jesus Christ, these two were made for each other!

(5AM waves goodbye mockingly to
BENJAMIN, who waves back, glassy-eyed,
continuing for a few seconds after 5AM
leaves. 5AM crosses the stage and stretches
across MARY's couch. MARY takes no
notice. BENJAMIN continues to stare ahead
in a trance-like state.)

MARY

(still behind the behind easel)

One solution was to use alcohol. On my father's side of the family, which ran a restaurant, all they did was drink and play cards together. The Ukrainians knew how to have a good time in my family. If I wanted to relax, I learned to have a drink. I took some liquor to one party and I must have had a blackout. At another party, I overdosed on aspirin trying to get high. I woke up at home and my father was furious at me.

(5AM sits up abruptly. MARY drops her
brush and turns around.)

5AM

You said that your mother didn't speak much, or that she doesn't speak much. What does her voice sound like?

MARY

(walks over to retrieve her brush)

I don't know how to answer that. I can hear it in my head, but I can't describe it.

5AM

(jumps up and prowls toward Mary, stopping
an inch from her face)

Is it high? Does it have a whine? Is it angry when you hear her voice?

MARY

Oh, no. Just matter-of-fact.

5AM

(nods and returns to the couch)

So what happened after high school?

MARY

(follows 5AM to the couch)

The University of Michigan. I did well in college at first—very well! But then I got involved with these people who had, well, non-academic values. I did LSD. So I had a bright academic future but I tossed it. I was falling apart.

5AM

And what happened then?

MARY

My mother and grandmother came to me and said, we want to send you to Europe. I *guess* it was a great thing to do, but it was clueless. I was a nineteen-year-old girl going off to London and Paris alone! Of course, all I did was wander around, and I got exploited by men. It was chaos. And I started to paint. And that, at least, was great. When I came back, I wanted to go to art school.

(Waking from his stupor, BENJAMIN looks left and right in search of 5AM.)

BENJAMIN

Hello?

5AM

(shouting across stage to BENJAMIN)

Tell me about deciding to go to Penn State!

BENJAMIN

Penn State was not my decision.

5AM

(to himself)

Okay.

(yelling across stage)

Well, tell me how you got to Penn State!

BENJAMIN

(stands up)

That was my father's—stepfather's—decision.

5AM

(to MARY)

Can you believe this guy?

(MARY laughs confusedly)

BENJAMIN

I didn't pick the school, I didn't pick the clothes I wore, I didn't pick my shampoo! I was a person without needs! He gave me a typewriter or

(picks up audio recorder for a few seconds)

a Dictaphone. I didn't ask for it but I couldn't say no because I was afraid. The college was his choice. I didn't know why I was there. I started to drink heavily. There was a girl—I thought I talked to her fine when I was drunk, like, 'Hey, what's poppin?' But when I was sober, I'd try talking to her and my voice would crack. So I drank, and I had blackouts.

MARY

Art school felt exactly right—although art schools have problems because they're collections of these wild children who are all doing drugs and alcohol.

(The sounds of young adults giggling and shushing each other invade BENJAMIN's apartment. Confused, he tries to shoo them away.)

MARY (cont.)

I got deeper into this subculture. I don't mean to cast aspersions because it was a wonderful group of people. It was liberating. It was exciting. I became educated about the world and became a liberal.

BENJAMIN

At Brown I had to drop out after half a semester. At that time there was not a focus on alcoholism in this country. I had a breakdown and they didn't ask me about alcohol at all! For the next five years I was in and out of hospitals and shrinks. I was sedated with very strong psychotropic medications. *Believe it or not*, I still see a psychiatrist today.

(5AM strides to the bookshelf, removes the trophies, and places one in each of BENJAMIN'S hands. BENJAMIN accepts them without acknowledgment.)

MARY

I had to get out of Detroit, so I went east. I was in Boston the morning I got the call.
(wanders downstage)

BENJAMIN

(begins when trophies reach his hands)

Then, I met a woman in my early 20s who really did not have an alcohol problem. I pulled myself together. Went back to school, got an MSW at Rutgers, became a social worker. Later on I got one year at Fordham in a doctoral program.

(pauses)

I did all that.

MARY

(begins when paintbrush reaches hand;
talking to 5AM but not facing her)

‘Our daddy’s dead.’ I can still hear my sister saying it. And I said, ‘No, not our daddy,’ and she said, ‘Yes.’

(MARY brandishes her paintbrush like a
blunt instrument. 5AM sits on the couch.)

Type-A guy. He had a massive coronary out of the blue. Turns out he had high blood pressure, so it was going to happen and it did. I went home right away. I didn’t even call my job to say what happened, so I lost my job. He and I were always arguing. You learn to talk to his grave.

BENJAMIN

She wanted a son and I didn’t want one because of my experience with my father. In my early 30s, a son was born. I left, fueled by alcohol.

(BENJAMIN places a trophy on the desk,
straightens his hair, then picks it back up.)

Six months later I was shooting heroin and cocaine. From the age of thirty-five to forty I was involved off and on with street drugs and alcohol.

(sinks to his knees, bellowing the next lines)

I lost my job, I lost my right to see my son, I lost my home!

MARY

(returning to the couch)

My grandmother died after my father. She was always a little overweight and she became diabetic. She lost one leg, and then the other leg, and then my mother couldn’t take care of her. She went to the nursing home and lost her mind. It was probably some kind of vascular dementia, some kind of dementia that’s associated with diabetes. She had a lot of strokes.

(BENJAMIN notices the trophies in his hands
and returns them to the bookshelf, then
returns to his seat.)

MARY (cont.)

It was a merciful dementia though, as far as I could tell. Because I remember very clearly how she’s lying in a nursing home and she can’t get anywhere. She doesn’t have any legs. And she thinks she’s touring England singing! Growing up in England, she was an accompanist, so this could have been memory or fantasy.

5AM

What was your communication like with her?

MARY

Well, I kind of did what you do. I was attentive and tried to draw her out, let her know how much I cared about her. Once, near the end, I brought up saying goodbye and she

MARY (cont.)

blew me off like, ‘That’s a depressing subject and why are you talking about this?’ I left and never saw her again.

5AM

So. Why did you come to New York?

MARY

I’m not sure why I came here. It wasn’t that far from Boston. I guess I came here because it was just, you know, New York. That’s enough of a reason. I found my community, a community of irregular people. We weren’t stiff. We were artists. We were hippies. They were gay. This was the seventies.

5AM

Tell me about your art.

MARY

The Warhol thing was going on, but we weren’t part of that.

(5AM snaps his fingers and Andy Warhol enters BENJAMIN’S apartment from stage right. BENJAMIN takes no notice, retrieves an orange from his pocket, and begins peeling it.)

MARY (cont.)

I think minimalism was happening then. But that was the art insider world: that’s what was showing in the galleries. The community we were in was different. I was doing art more along the lines of Frida Kahlo.

(5AM snaps twice and Frida Kahlo enters next to Warhol. BENJAMIN peels off an orange segment and chews it. He looks up, sees the artists, and stops chewing. Then he swallows, peels off a couple more segments, and holds them out in offering. Kahlo and Warhol join BENJAMIN and eat. The artists shake BENJAMIN’s hand and exit stage right.)

MARY (cont.)

It was narrative art. It was about being a woman. It was the last thing the New York art world wanted to look at because it wasn’t cool or decorative. Of course, I was still drinking and drugging. That allowed me to keep my head in the sand in terms of the commercial value of my work. Because there was no commercial value for my work. No one is going to buy a painting of a woman ripping her stomach in half to hang over their

MARY (cont.)

couch, *ever*. Eventually, I got my head out of the sand. Drugs and alcohol just turn on you. I went to grad school and became an art therapist and started to paint sane art.

(places the brush back on the easel)

(5AM unintentionally backs into
BENJAMIN'S apartment.)

BENJAMIN

Oh! There you are. At forty, I began to sober up in Alcoholics Anonymous. Today, I'm twenty-eight years sober. My son has been back in my life twenty-seven of those twenty-eight years. I just had a grandchild a couple months ago. I remarried very successfully to a sober woman who you will meet.

MARY

Ben is the miracle in my life. I mean really, you met him.

5AM

(to BENJAMIN)

So at what point did your father start showing signs of changing, of losing his memory?

BENJAMIN

My biological mother was the carrier of Alzheimer's. So it's more relevant because my father is not genetic. And my mother died prior to my father by a couple years.

5AM

Right, sure, let's talk about that. Let's talk about signs that *she* was changing.

BENJAMIN

(hesitates)

There was a time when she wasn't able to understand who the voice was on the phone.

MARY

(to the audience)

Ben's stepdad took care of his mother, so we weren't very burdened with her illness.

BENJAMIN

I know the end.

MARY

She would go out to lunch every now and then, on a holiday. She was sweet as could be, but didn't say much and just floated along with the vibes. I think Ben's dad initially liked having a woman where he could be the boss. But he got more than he bargained for by the end.

(retreats to couch)

BENJAMIN

(mimes picking up a landline phone)

My father called me from Long Island.

(mimes picking up a cell phone)

I called 9-1-1 while he was hanging on the phone. My mother was screaming, she was on the floor, just crazed, and then she was taken to the hospital. Mary and I went out there and she wasn't able to speak. The doctor said she wouldn't leave the hospital.

(pauses)

She's the Alzheimer's biological, if that's important.

5AM

Right, the biology. Thank you. You were talking about your mother in the hospital.

BENJAMIN

I was there for the hospital visits, all the time every single day. She wasn't talking and we didn't know if she could hear anything. The family was urged to let her go, but my stepfather had to come to some peace.

(pauses)

Finally, we stopped her medication. I was alone with her in the hospital room. I held my mother's head while she died. I was sober, sober for my family.

5AM

What did she look like when she was in the hospital?

BENJAMIN

She had a wig, but she wasn't using the wig. So she was bald, and that was sort of strange. She was crunched up. As with anyone who's dying, they're little, they're, it's a very—I can't describe when death is ready.

5AM

Sure, sure. Did you talk with your father about your mother?

BENJAMIN

No. I mean, he would say something about her, that he misses her, she was wonderful, he loved her. Meanwhile he screamed at her the whole time she was alive.

5AM

Tell me more about those memories he would talk about of good times with your mother.

BENJAMIN

She played the piano wonderfully, she knew all about cultural events. They would go to the New York Philharmonic. In the latter years of their lives together, they sat almost holding hands, watching TV. I don't know how that changed from a memory of fear.

MARY

(walking downstage)

Ben's stepdad talked *endlessly*. He would pontificate and he had to run things. Once, I had to put my foot down. It was in a hospital room. He was cursing, talking to us all like dirt. I said something to him like that's not right and you have to stop. And he just backed off like a little kitty cat. It was shocking.

(sits in chair behind easel)

5AM

Let's talk about your father's memory loss if that's okay.

BENJAMIN

My stepfather.

5AM

Your stepfather, yes.

(moves to aisle with stool)

BENJAMIN

(to himself)

We had to wait it out. We had to wait out his inability to do checks and bills where he was paying four thousand dollars instead of forty dollars. He was living alone in Manhasset.

MARY

Of course, he just had to drive. He had to control everything. At one point we were driving with him and he almost drove us all right into another car. *That* was a big red flag. At some point we took his car from him. It got ugly then—even his doctor did not support us. But his doctor was not in the car about to be killed! So we confiscated his car and hid it.

BENJAMIN

We'd take him to the diner and he would sort of socialize with people there, but later on he started mumbling his words. We would take him to the supermarket.

MARY

Even grocery shopping got to be too difficult. He'd get lost in the store.

BENJAMIN

Finally, the family jokes about this but we kidnapped him.

MARY

We all figured that he needed assisted living, and there was no way he was going to agree to it.

BENJAMIN

He was not too with it at the time, fortunately.

MARY

We took him to visit an assisted living facility and he loved it. And then, when we said okay we're leaving now and you're not leaving with us—

BENJAMIN

He raised hell.

MARY

The administrator said don't worry, we can handle this. So we signed him in and we left. The guy said it would take two weeks and he'll be fine.

(pauses)

Two weeks later, he was happier than he'd ever been in his life!

BENJAMIN

With Alzheimer's, you become more angry or you become all of a sudden a nice guy.

MARY

Everybody knew his name. After nearly all his life, he was finally the prince of the house.

BENJAMIN

It was the best period in his life. He would kid around with the staff about basketball. He made motions about how he would shoot

(mimes a shot)

and they would reciprocate. He was conversant without anger. We would talk long hours a lot of times during the week.

5AM

What would you talk about?

BENJAMIN

I mean we didn't really talk: I asked *him* questions, he didn't ask about *me*. He did—say that he loved me and that I was a good boy. When there was nice weather I sat on the bench with him outside.

(5AM sits on the table next to BENJAMIN;

BENJAMIN redirects focus to 5AM)

He would go wild over the babies that would go by. He talked about growing up in the Bronx and his brother Lou who was funny, handsome, the girls all liked Lou. Lou died at a young age. He talked about meeting my mother and me at Long Beach. I had good memories of him playing with me, how he taught me how to ride the waves on the ocean. He talked about playing basketball, being all-city for New York. Talked about his wife, my mother, 'She was such a good woman.'

5AM

Did you put your arm around your father's back, or anything like that?

BENJAMIN

Yeah, absolutely. Well I hugged him a few times, and I was helping him move a lot.

5AM

Did he ever say anything strange?

BENJAMIN

He was in his mid-eighties and was still attracted to women.

5AM

In his assisted living facility?

BENJAMIN

Yeah, his assisted living facility. Other women.

5AM

Really?

BENJAMIN

We were sitting in the lounge one day and an old woman with a walker shuffles by and he says, 'Oy gevalt, would you look at that tuchus bounce!'

(BENJAMIN and 5AM laugh; 5AM stops first.)

At the same time, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, his speech was going. Sometimes he would show frustration that he couldn't get the words. But generally, he slipped further into the dementia and it wasn't tortured. He just went into it. At the end he was just making faces, trying to be funny. He was almost like a child.

5AM

When he got to that point, what would you do?

BENJAMIN

Make faces back.

5AM

So we're talking like sticking out your tongue, or—

BENJAMIN

Yeah, yeah. Like—

(sticks out tongue, flares nostrils and widens eyes)

5AM

Still finding some humor.

BENJAMIN

Right to the end.

(5AM moves back to the stool.)

MARY

(to the audience)

Ben's father raised him to be a prince who would have a coterie of people to handle things. But I was raised to handle everything, so I took care of the finances. Suddenly you have to figure out where everything is and how to pay for everything, and taxes. Plus constant trips to the hospital. Plus you have a job and a life of your own.

BENJAMIN

Then he started having issues with diabetes, or maybe his heart. He was in the hospital. He would get angry at the hospital attendants sometimes, almost appropriately.

5AM

What made his frustration appropriate?

BENJAMIN

How would you feel if you didn't understand and they're drawing blood or taking your pressure? We know what it is but they don't, he doesn't know what it is. Why are you moving me on a wheelchair? Why are we going to this place? You try to explain it to him but of course he doesn't understand.

MARY

In the hospital, then out of the hospital, then in the hospital—

BENJAMIN

He is totally naked and screaming at EMS people. But the EMS people can't take him in the ambulance unless he calms down. And they're not permitted to sedate him. He is screaming 'Please help me, please help me, someone please help me.'

MARY

He's strapped to the chair in a nursing home. He can't say a word. He's just trying to unknot the strap that's holding him in the chair.

BENJAMIN

Once again, I was in the room when he died. Mary was also. The family had a vigil at the end at the hospital, we had taken away the—you know, Do Not Resuscitate. We were waiting and he was there and we were sleeping on the floor and he died.

(suddenly remembering)

BENJAMIN (cont.)

Actually, going back, the memory I have of my mother is that she couldn't speak but she was reaching for words. It was hard for her to swallow and she was gasping for air.

5AM

Wow.

BENJAMIN

That's the kind of stuff that happens.

MARY

Ben's parents were lovely to me. He's Jewish, you know, full-blown. I mean he's not Jewish in a religious way. I was a baptized Catholic, but I'm not religious. But we came from different cultures. And they were so accepting towards me. I treasure that to this day.

5AM

So your father eventually passes away. Then what happens with your life?

BENJAMIN

Well my life already had changed because of being retired.

MARY

Ben stopped working because he had this Hepatitis C treatment which was like chemo. So he had time then. He made me dinner, took care of the household, did all of the bills. I really got how these guys back in the fifties wanted their wife at home to tidy up and have dinner ready when they came home from work. Everyone should have some time like that.

BENJAMIN

I like my life, essentially. I like not working. I do volunteer for AA twice a week. I read a lot, watch old European films, go to the library, go to the gym every day for two hours. We have a condo in Michigan, we go there for two and a half months. And we're going to Paris in the summer, we're going to California, we're going to Miami.

MARY

He's a film guru, this man. He's seen a gazillion films. He goes to the library and gets films for us, and every night we see a great film. I've gotten to be quite the fusspot because I'm spoiled by that. We call him the entertainment chairman.

BENJAMIN

Watching a movie, every fifteen minutes we have to stop and I have to ask Mary, 'Who are these people? Are these the same people that we watched five minutes ago?'

(pauses)

It's been that way since I was a kid.

MARY

(stands up)

As long as one's a woman and one is black and one is Chinese, he's alright. But if you don't have very distinct physical characteristics, then he gets lost quite easily. He's got a brain where he's extraordinarily clever, I mean like a genius in some ways, but in other ways he's a *doofus*. With face recognition and directions, ever since I met him he's been a doofus in those areas.

(MARY lies down on the couch on her right side, facing upstage.)

BENJAMIN

Then seven or eight years ago, I was feeling that I couldn't connect things from Point A to Point B. Finding and spelling words was difficult. Mary said my handwriting was slipping and that I couldn't do math.

MARY

(rolls left, eyes closed, stretching her left arm up and slowly lowering it toward the audience)

I rolled over in my sleep, and instead of hitting Ben—

(bounces her arm on what would be her bed and opens her eyes)

I just hit more bed.

(sits up, mimes checking a bedside clock)

It was 5AM.

(gets up and mimes peering into the master bathroom)

He wasn't in the bathroom.

(mimes wrapping herself in a bed sheet and tip-toes downstage; mimes checking the office and then hearing something further down the hallway)

He wasn't in the office either, but there was a noise.

(tip-toes to the right)

I followed it to the living room, where the TV was on.

(stops behind BENJAMIN)

There sat Ben in front of the TV, fully dressed, eating barbeque potato chips. I put my hand on his shoulder, and he turned to me and smiled and said, "Mary, my doll! Do you know what this is?" I said, "No." And he said, "This—

(mimes shooting a basketball)

"—is SportsCenter!"

(returns to the couch)

BENJAMIN

I took neurological testing and I was told I had mild cognitive impairment. Then three years ago I did more tests. We tested on spelling, confusion, word finding, and following things in stories and comprehension. This time—

(pauses)

– the doctor said I had early Alzheimer's.

5AM

Can you describe those tests in a bit more detail, those questions that involve the stories?

BENJAMIN

Well, there's a story about someone going to the store, then they go to a picnic. The questions are what did they do, what did they say. As much as I concentrate, I don't remember the order of events. Or they'll say a sequence of numbers. Do you remember these numbers? And then they add more numbers, and then they add more numbers! How many numbers can you remember?

5AM

How does taking the test make you feel?

BENJAMIN

It makes me feel terrible! They say don't get anxious, but I'm an anxious guy and when you say that I don't remember what I'm doing, I'm going to get more anxious and then results are not good.

MARY

But then he saw a doctor who questioned how anyone could diagnose him when he's taking this med and that med at these doses. Ben got serious about cutting down on his meds. Lo and behold—

BENJAMIN

My spelling has been better, my checks have been better, my face recognition is still terrible but it was in my twenties.

MARY

(MARY walks purposefully to the right and slightly downstage.)

He looked better to me, way better. Then the doctor put it in a way that really made sense.

(turns a sharp left; 5AM moves upstage center)

He said it's true that he still has Alzheimer's disease, but the medication's a stressor.

(turns sharply to the right, zigzagging toward the audience)

When he gets these stressors he's *just going* to look bad because it exposes the underlying disease.

MARY (cont.)

(turns left again)

I saw this happen recently when he had anesthesia for surgery. He didn't know where he was, why he was there. He knew my name—that's about all he knew.

(stops)

But today, Ben does fine if he's doing his routines.

BENJAMIN

(begins pacing left and right)

Word finding bothers me. I'm thinking with you when you called I had a difficult time expressing myself. I'm just trying to get the right words out. I know I'm using words that I don't want to use.

(stops pacing)

(5AM shifts his gaze left and right as
BENJAMIN and MARY trade dialogue.)

MARY

(begins pacing)

He goes to his gym, he goes to his AA meeting, he goes to his grocery store, he watches his show, he buys his newspaper. And he can learn new things. It's like he's doing fine.

(stops)

BENJAMIN

(resumes pacing)

There's a paragraph in the New York Times and then there's another paragraph. How does it relate? I know it should relate.

(stops)

MARY

We're in, I'd say, the sweet spot of Alzheimer's disease because Ben is out and about.

BENJAMIN

I go to meetings, things are said, and I don't laugh like other people. This happened yesterday.

MARY

He's happy, I'm happy. We both have our lives and it's good.

(MARY sits on the stage.)

There is this cloud over our head that things will get worse. We're hoping it will be very gradual like it's been, and that we'll both die of something else by the time Alzheimer's gets a real good grip on him. But it's a threat that doesn't ever go away. We forget about it from moment to moment, but it comes back. Recently, Ben has been using the wrong word. It's kind of the word that would be stored in the next zone in your brain. Instead of saying 'the cat' he might say 'the cow' or 'the dog.' It only happens once every couple of days that I notice. But it's a little worry, like 'Oh shit! Yikes!'

BENJAMIN

(sits on his chair)

Whenever I find it difficult to find words, it can kick in where I feel, oh my God. The end result of this disease is horrible. I don't want to go there.

5AM

(sits on floor and speaks to both)

What is it like for you talking about memory loss?

BENJAMIN

I reluctantly acknowledged that I have a memory disorder, but I don't like the word Alzheimer's. Mary uses it.

MARY

(moves to chair)

If I say the word 'Alzheimer's' it pisses Ben off. He always gets mad at me, every time. I end up saying stop treating me like the enemy. Then he thinks about it and he says, 'Yeah, I've got to stop doing that, I'm in some denial here.'

BENJAMIN

Mary says that I come home every day with some issues of memory disorder and I tell her about it. I don't even remember, but she says that I talk about it to her every day. So maybe she's hearing it more than I'm saying it.

MARY

Sometimes I'm tempted to overlook things. If he uses the wrong word, I don't have to say that's the wrong word because I understand what he's saying. It's a tightrope. You don't want to live in a bubble of denial, but you don't want to pound away—Alzheimer's, Alzheimer's, Alzheimer's, every day. He gets mad, but hey, I can handle that. I'm a woman and I can stick up for myself.

5AM

(to BENJAMIN; moves back to stool)

Tell me about getting lost.

BENJAMIN

I don't get lost! The support group I go to, those people can't travel alone. They can't figure out how to get to the place. But that's not me right now. I don't do that anymore except in doctors' offices where I can't find my way out.

5AM

So you went through a period where you were getting lost, but that ended.

MARY

I think both of us are trying to live more in the moment and not trying to think about tomorrow or next year or the year after so much. We just try to love what we have and love each other and appreciate the gift of the day.

BENJAMIN

Yeah. It just—it got better. Maybe I just got less anxious about it.

5AM

Do you remember a time when you were lost?

MARY

When I do think about the future though, I do a number of scenarios. I'll give you three that come right to mind.

BENJAMIN

Uh...

(5AM unscrews the light bulb from the desk lamp, walks behind BENJAMIN, and screws it into BENJAMIN'S head. It lights up.)

Yes!

(BENJAMIN jumps up, the light bulb bouncing back and forth. 5AM stumbles backward.)

I had jury duty. I know how to walk from here to the courts. But somehow, I walked there and I walked past there, and I walked right to the border on the South Seaport.

(5AM retrieves the light bulb from BENJAMIN'S head.)

Everything looked unfamiliar, and then I began to sort of panic. Where was I, what about the court, what about the time I'm supposed to be there.

MARY

One scenario is that I drop dead and Ben is left. What's going to happen to him? So I've given him a variety of orders on what he should do. He does have a son in California, so I do know that if Ben were in trouble, his son would take care of him. If it happened tomorrow, Ben would be okay financially. Emotionally he'd need a lot of help, but he's resourceful. He knows how to reach out for help.

BENJAMIN

(Seeing a stream of imaginary pedestrians, BENJAMIN stands up and walks toward one, then another, then another.)

I started to ask people on the street. Most people don't want to have anything to do with you. They have things to do.

(stops)

BENJAMIN (cont.)

But then finally this very nice woman, she said, “You’re twenty-five minutes from the courts.” I said “Really?” She said, “You have to take a subway to get there.”

(BENJAMIN returns to his chair. 5AM starts walking playfully across the stage, swooping his legs, tossing and catching the light bulb.)

MARY

The second scenario—I’m trying to avoid the scenario I don’t want to think about—is that this is all a very slow process. We both live and there’s time to adjust. That’s the scenario I get from my support group, and so far that’s what I see happening. We adapt. We might need therapy. We might need doctors. We might need all kinds of things, but we can adapt.

BENJAMIN

I did take a subway, and I got there not too late.

(laughs)

After that I knew exactly where I was. It was unbelievable how I took Broadway all the way down.

5AM

How long ago was this?

(tosses the light bulb high in the air)

BENJAMIN

I’m not sure. That’s—I would say—two weeks ago.

(5AM turns and stares at BENJAMIN, and the light bulb shatters on the stage. No one reacts.)

MARY

And then—and then there’s the third scenario.

BENJAMIN

(laughing, as if this could never really happen)

I’m horrified by thinking that I’ll slip into a state where Mary would be there and I wouldn’t know she’s there. I have to stay away from that way of thinking.

5AM

(sits on the stool)

Is there anything else you’d like to talk about in relation to your life or memory loss, or anything?

BENJAMIN

(joking)

I hope my memory loss continues to be slow.

5AM

(laughs, pats BENJAMIN on the arm)

Yeah?

(MARY walks downstage.)

MARY

I met a man when I was going to AA—where you're *not* supposed to go to meet people, but it happens. He was handsome. That's all I needed. He was good-looking and he was speaking and I thought he was the one for me. The meeting ended and I wanted to say hi, but he was talking with other people. Then when I wasn't looking, he left. I was disappointed, of course. He left and I left and I thought that it was over. Then I went to the subway and there he was. I swear to you at that moment I heard a voice in my head say, "Three strikes and you're out." So I walked over to him and I said to him, "I want you to know that I'm not following you." And he said back—

(pauses, trying to speak)

"—I wouldn't mind if you were. My name is Ben, what's yours?" We rode the train back to our stations and he asked me for my number to have coffee, and that was the beginning.

(BLACKOUT)

(END)