

In Memory of Mrs. Mary Brown

A ten minute play

Characters

FLORENCE, old, female

MARY, young, female

Time

Very late one afternoon

Place

The Choir Practice Room at church

Synopsis: *Florence, an older woman seeks closure on her life and on her relationship with her deceased friend, Mary. While polishing a plaque on a chair in the choir practice room of their church, Florence decides she wants to know what Mary would have said if she had revealed her love for Mary. The play begins when Mary appears to Florence as Florence is polishing the memorial plaque she created for Mary. The play ends when Florence makes a decision.*

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In Memory of Mrs. Mary Brown

A ten minute play

Lights up on FLORENCE, polishing a small brass plaque on the back of a chair, which we probably do not see. But we can see FLORENCE working. We are in a church choir practice room.

FLORENCE

(Singing a hymn) Be strong and valiant for the truth.
Resist the tempter's luring power.
Shun all the avenues of sin,
And trust in God each day and hour.

A young MARY is there. She reads the plaque.

MARY

"In Memory of Mrs. Mary Brown, from Mrs. Florence Gray." Beautiful. Humble.

FLORENCE

Tarnished.

MARY

Barely.

FLORENCE

Only two months, and already.

MARY

Seventh time you've polished it.

FLORENCE

Unrelenting oxidation.

MARY

You should see what six months of decay has done to me.

FLORENCE

You look wonderful.

MARY

(trying to see her reflection in the plaque) I can't tell.

FLORENCE

Doing the best I can. Not a mirror.

MARY

Humble, right. When you're gone...

FLORENCE

Not gone yet.

MARY

When you can't come to polish any more...

FLORENCE

Cathy promises to take over for me.

MARY

Dutiful daughter.

FLORENCE

Loving daughter.

MARY

Same thing?

FLORENCE

Hardly.

MARY

I wouldn't know.

FLORENCE

Didn't mean to wound.

MARY

Oh no, no. I thank you for my legacy.

FLORENCE

Made Cathy promise to pass it along to her kids. Et cetera. You will shine brightly forever.

MARY

Thank you. What about you?

FLORENCE

Oh, me.

MARY

Who will plaque a choir room chair for you?

FLORENCE

Not about me.

MARY

I would have done the same for you, you know. "In memory of Mrs. Florence Gray, from Mrs. Mary Brown."

FLORENCE

Do believe you would have.

MARY

I can almost see myself now. That is so thoughtful of you to remember me looking like this.

FLORENCE

Full of thought.

MARY

I was a sight at seventy-five. Smoking. Lord, I always said my older self would forgive my younger self if I got cancer but I could not forgive myself for what the cigarettes did to my face.

FLORENCE

Don't see it.

MARY

Bill saw it. Kiss kiss. "I thought the fiftieth anniversary was gold, not leather."

FLORENCE

Bill.

MARY

Bill.

FLORENCE

Did you know...?

MARY

Know?

FLORENCE

Never mind.

MARY

I mind.

FLORENCE

Did you know he didn't cry?

MARY

Not surprised.

FLORENCE

Not that I saw. He might have cried. Later.

MARY

I doubt he cried. I wouldn't have cried if I were him. The skin on your ankles splits at the end. It oozes pus, fluid. He had to wear rubber gloves to patch it up.

FLORENCE

I patched you up once, too. At the end. Gloveless.

MARY

Why should he cry?

FLORENCE

Gloveless.

MARY

Loveless.

FLORENCE

I patched you up. You were out of it. Bill was...

MARY

Out of it, too?

FLORENCE

Tired out.

MARY

Ed will plaque you. "In Memory of Mrs. Florence Gray, from Mr. Ed Gray."

FLORENCE

So formal.

MARY

Exactly what you wrote for me.

FLORENCE

Well that's different.

MARY

How so?

FLORENCE

A husband's words...

MARY

What words would you have him hurl to the universe?

FLORENCE

In memory of my loving wife Florence...In memory of Florence from her loving husband Ed.

MARY

Please.

FLORENCE

How dare you!

MARY

Cut the crap.

FLORENCE

It's cut.

MARY

There'll be no plaque. Just a tombstone. Florence Gray. May eleventh, nineteen thirty -

FLORENCE

He's going first.

MARY

Says who?

FLORENCE

Oh, he's going first.

MARY

Cut the crap. You deserve a plaque.

FLORENCE

Already have one. "In Memory of Mrs. Mary Brown, from Mrs. Florence Gray."

MARY

Your own.

FLORENCE

That is mine. I had it made.

MARY

I mean -

FLORENCE

I know what you mean.

MARY

I guess Cathy is your plaque. And her kids.

FLORENCE

Kids aren't everything. They'll be gone, too.

MARY

Kind of you to say.

FLORENCE

Not being kind.

MARY

But that is our purpose. A purpose I did not fulfill.

FLORENCE

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" You did that, Mary Brown.

MARY

I suppose.

FLORENCE

And what did I do?

MARY

The same. You did. You walked humbly with our God.

FLORENCE

A humble plaque.

MARY

Too humble.

FLORENCE

Too humble?

MARY

Young Mary Brown. First alto. Third chair from the right. This very room.

Then. FLORENCE is younger.

FLORENCE and MARY

(Singing from hymnals) Be strong and valiant for the truth.
Resist the tempter's luring power.
Shun all the avenues of sin,
And trust in God each day and hour.

FLORENCE

I feel so sorry for you altos.

MARY

Sorry?

FLORENCE

We sopranos get the melody. Altos...thankless.

MARY

We make it sound complete. Nobody really hears us. But if we weren't there, they'd sure know.

Mary.

FLORENCE

Florence.

MARY

Is it always just hymns?

FLORENCE

What else would it be?

MARY

There's more than hymns.

FLORENCE

Not in this church.

MARY

Maybe if we ask politely. Or maybe we just start singing on our own. You and me?

Now. FLORENCE is old again.

FLORENCE

If I could have...when you were then, as I see you now...if I could have said to you, "Walk with me Mary Brown. Walk humbly through your life with me and only me..." What would you have said?

MARY

I know what you want me to say.

FLORENCE

Say, "I will walk humbly through my life with you, Florence Gray. We will say goodbye to the Brown and the Gray. We will be Mary and Florence Fountain. Mary Flo Fountain! Two women, one soul, one life. Come what may."

MARY

I could say that.

FLORENCE

Then say it.

MARY

I could say it and you would be...

FLORENCE

Happy?

MARY

Remorseful.

FLORENCE

No.

MARY

You polish a plaque that says only "In Memory of Mrs. Mary Brown, by Mrs. Florence Gray."

FLORENCE

I couldn't say it then. But if I had said it...

MARY

You will never know.

FLORENCE

Tell me that you would have said, "Yes."

MARY

You will never know.

FLORENCE

Tell me!

MARY

Fine. Words hurled to the universe... "I will walk humbly through my life with you, Florence Gray. We will say goodbye to the Brown and the Gray. We will be Mary and Florence Fountain. Mary Flo Fountain! Two women, one soul, one life. Blah blah blah."

FLORENCE

Don't blah blah blah! It was never blah blah blah.

FLORENCE hurls a hymnal. It falls open. A choir sings another verse of the same hymn.

FLORENCE and MARY

He is our Rock, our Tower high,
And to the meek he giveth Grace;
To love with hearts that open wide
And see the joy upon His face.

FLORENCE

Could there have been an Ed-less, Bill-less, guiltless life and a different gloveless loveless end?

MARY

And a different plaque.

FLORENCE

And an honest plaque. "In loving memory of my // Fountain of Joy, Mary -

MARY

But this is the humble plaque there is. The humble stumble plaque there is. "In Memory of Mrs. Mary Brown, from Mrs. Florence Gray." Cathy will stop coming to polish.

FLORENCE

She promised.

MARY

Cut the crap.

FLORENCE

Cut.

MARY

Cathy will stop coming to polish unless she knows.

FLORENCE polishes as if her life depends on it.

Be strong and valiant for the truth.

FLORENCE

I patched you up. Gloveless. If I had ever said to you, "Walk with me Mary Brown. Walk through your life with me and only me..." What would you have said?"

MARY

You will never know.

FLORENCE

I will never know. I did not say it. And I will never know.

MARY

How does that feel?

FLORENCE

Your plaque tarnishes so quickly, Mary. Every week. Every, every, every week.

MARY

The last week.

FLORENCE

Not the last week.

MARY

Your last week.

FLORENCE

This is not my last week.

MARY

Your last week.

FLORENCE

Yes, this is my last week.

MARY

I do so appreciate the plaque. And all the polishing. Tell Cathy and Ed why you polish every week. There is no more important work in this universe, Florence.

FLORENCE

No more important words in this universe.

FLORENCE polishes the plaque.

END OF PLAY