

Voices of My Life

by

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Cast of Characters

Setting:	Any City, modern times
Johnny Eisner	Primary character. Captain Fire Department. Early 40's. Strong physically, broad chest. The "All American" sort of guy.
Angel of Death	A man, dressed in black on black. Everything about him is black. Tall, thin. Wears a robe.
Angel of Life	A woman, dressed in white on white. White powerdy skin. Speaks only the last line of the play. She communicates by opening the lives of others through her body and spirit. She does this physically by opening her hands outward, as if held within them were contained the lives of the various people who she brings forth.
Marnie Eisner	Johnny's 16 year old daughter. Ponytail, jeans, conservatively dressed. Cute and perky. Very much "the girl across the street".
Harold Jefferies	Captain in Fire Department. Late 40's. Average in every way. In control, but you can sense the emotions that are running strongly.
Doctor Manning	Late 60's. Has a large streak of white hair in the middle of his head that he pulls straight back. White coat, typical doctor appearance.
Sherry	Johnny's girlfriend. Bleach blonde, big chested, wearing a too tight top and a very short skirt. Bright red lipstick. High pitched voice.
June	Johnny's ex-wife. Late thirties, but really looks older. Grungy hair and clothes. Looks like someone who has had a hard life. No color in anything she wears, no makeup, hair flat. Average build and looks.
Gerald Eisner	Johnny's father. Dressed in work clothes. Late 60's. Glasses and a pipe, carpenter's belt.
Chip & Bud Eisner	Johnny's sons. They first appear at the ages of approximately 10 and 11. They appear later in their late 20's. Wavy hair, good looking "macho" type men.
Two young firemen	Average.
Two small children	Black, brother and sister; 4 and 7 years old.
Off stage narrator	Voice only, male or female.

Act One / Scene One

(A flashback sequence)

Setting: Fireman academy. Guest lecture given by Captain Johnny Eisner wearing a crisp white shirt, red tie with gold insignia denoting his rank.
Speaking to a group of first year students.

Captain Johnny Eisner: “Follow the book! The worse the situation, the more important it is to follow the book to the letter. The book is everything! If you don’t follow the book, you will cost someone their life. Perhaps it will even be yours. Do not be swayed by sympathy or other emotions. To do so is the worst mistake you can make. The fire has no emotion. It is only a process; it will burn until everything is consumed, or we will put it out first. The first rule of the book is never, never remove your protection equipment. Your helmet, gloves, boots and yellow pants and coat are the equivalent of medieval armor. No single man can stand against a fire without protective equipment. When you’re on that line by yourself, and everything has gone to hell in a hand basket,
his FOLLOW THE BOOK!”

Act One / Scene Two

Setting: Fire in an old 7 story brick building. Johnny Eisner is huddled against the window of the landing on the 5th floor. He is holding two small black children, brother and sister, perhaps 4 and 7 years old.

Off Stage Narrator: “The fire is raging out of control. They have been cut off from any means of escape either up or down. The only possible way out is through the window but there has been a mechanical breakdown with the ladder truck on the scene. Johnny Eisner is in radio communication with the other Captain Harold Jeffries. Captain Jeffries was on the scene first so he is in charge.”

Captain Johnny Eisner: “Harold, you having any luck down there getting the ladder running? It’s getting pretty hot up here.”

Captain Harold Jefferies: “Johnnny, we’re having plenty of trouble. Floors 3 and 4 have arched over, I’ve had to pull the boys back. The ladder truck is

still down, the replacement from Firehouse 12 is another 7 minutes away. There's something else Johnny.....".

Johnny Eisner: "Okay Harold, what's wrong?"

Captain Harold Jefferies: "In the basement we've found what used to be a paint company. Through the windows the guys can see the varnish and paint drums letting off vapors. There's one door between the stuff and the stair well."

Johnny Eisner: "Oh....."

Captain Harold Jefferies: "Johnny, she's going to blow! And I mean a big, mean fireball! No way to stop or cool this thing off enough now. I can't get any help to you, Johnny. Its the book, unless maybe you think..."

Johnny Eisner: "Stay right by the book, Harold. The book says no fireman goes in until there is an exit in place and water coming out a hose. It doesn't look very good from here either."

Captain Harold Jefferies: "We've got another 6 minutes before the ladder gets here. Those kids with you, can you get behind anything to protect them from the fireball?"

Johnny Eisner: "No! We're pinned down on the stairwell landing. No way to move at all. On my own, I might be able to make it down one floor, but no way the kids would make it. I guess we'll just have to wait on that ladder truck."

Captain Harold Jefferies: "Johnny, this is serious shit! I've got to get that ladder truck up, you and those kids out and then put some water down that stairway from above before we can vent that basement. Otherwise....

Johnny Eisner: "I got it. By the book! By the book!"

Captain Harold Jefferies: "Johnny, you got your protection on right? (his fireproof clothing that offers protection from the kind of explosive flash over that is getting ready to occur.)"

Johnny Eisner: "Thanks, Hal. I got to take care of these kids."

Off Stage Narrator: "With that, Captain Johnny Eisner breaks one of the cardinal rules of fire fighting. He takes off the coat that can save him and wraps it around the two little children who are standing behind him. One of the first rules of being a firefighter is to never sacrifice yourself to save someone else. It never works out. The young

spoke
that

firefighters wouldn't know when and what to do. Heroes don't win the battles; cold hard thinking usually does. Johnny knew it as well as anyone. He was so much a "by the book guy" that he at every class that went through the Academy. But here it was, one in a million situation. Two crying little children. Their eyes seemed as if white saucers were shining in the darkness. Maybe 4 and 7. Brother and sister, trying to take care of each other. Scared to death!

Johnny took off his coat, his big yellow heavy coat. The coat that could stand 900 degrees for 45 seconds before harm came to the body inside. Johnny took that coat and wrapped it around the crying children and held them tightly in his arms as he waited for the fireball. He didn't have to wait long."

Setting:
children.

Flash of light and fire engulfing Johnny Eisner and the two

Stage to darkness.

Act Two / Scene One

Setting: The stage is oriented to the left side. Johnny is in the critical care portion of the burn center in the hospital. This is a dialogue between the doctor and Johnny's family. It's being held bedside. The room is full of wires and gadgets, etc. that are hooked up to his body. A body which we don't see very much of.

Doctor Manning:

"Johnny has been burned terribly. I don't want to offer anyone any false hope. He is critical, he may die no matter what we do and there are some issues that you all need to deal with. But first, you need to understand the facts. Forty percent of Johnny's skin has been burned off from the waist up. I do mean burned off. Part of the muscle underneath the skin has been cooked. We've had to remove that so gangrene doesn't set in. But infection is a terrible risk now because the body has lost its protective coating. Johnny is in as much pain as a human being can experience. I'm not using the word "endure" because the full force of the pain would kill him. I need some guidance from you. Right now, from his moaning, respiration and blood pressure, I know that he is in a living hell. But if I give him any more morphine, it will suppress his breathing and circulation. He will die. But it will be a peaceful death, without pain. You all need to understand that Johnny may die no matter what we do. But most people that have survived

burns like this have told me repeatedly that they wish they had been allowed to die a painless death. There are even legal movements now that are seeking to establish what a patient's rights are relative to intense pain."

Sherry "But isn't he going to get all better? I mean if Johnny lives won't he be his old self again?"

Doctor Manning: "Johnny will never be his old self again. I can assure you of that. The skin grafts and other surgeries that would be required would take years. After that he would continue to have pain the rest of his life. The kind of pain only women having babies can understand. After a year or so of physical rehabilitation he would be able to walk some and move his arms a little. The body never recovers from something as bad as this, so his life span at the very most would be ten years from this point. And..... pain would continue to be a problem. It's not just the skin that gets burns of. The nerve endings underneath the skin have had terrible damage also."

Marnie "Doctor, I'm the oldest and I just want to be sure there are no other options available to us."

Doctor Manning: "There is one other thing we can do. We can drastically reduce the amount of morphine that I'm giving Johnny now and he will become fully conscious. Then you can ask him what he wants. But I need to tell you up front, that he is going to be in a pain that only someone who has been through this can imagine when he becomes conscious. But we can ask Johnny and let him decide. I will not accept Johnny's decision unless he is lucid and capable of understanding what's going on, and what his options are."

Marnie: (after looking around the room, surveying the responses)
"Doctor Manning, I think we want Dad to be making this decision."

Act Two / Scene Two

Setting: The stage is darkened. To the left is Johnny's hospital bed; the lights are low, everyone is standing around looking at him. To the right of the split stage, another scene is developing. Johnny is standing in the center of the right stage area. The lights come up a bit and then dim back and forth.

Johnny Eisner: (addressing the audience, as the lights come up; lights vacillate)
"Hey, what's going on around here? The lights seem to be coming and going."

(Now enters the Angel of Life)

Johnny Eisner: "Who are you? What's going on around here? Where am I?"

(From the far section of the second split stage, the Angel of Death steps forward)

Angel of Death: "She can't speak.... you know."

Johnny Eisner: "Who are you?"

Angel of Death: "First I want to tell you what I'm here to do for you, then I'll tell you my name."

Johnny Eisner: "Well if you can make sense of any of this, go right ahead."

Angel of Death: "I will, Johnny, but first I need to tell you that we don't have a lot of time. I have come with open arms to bring you rest and relief from all of life's burdens. I bring you an instant and complete cure from any sickness. I bring you to the place where, if things go your way, you can have anything you ever wanted, for as long as you want. More than anything else, I've come to offer you Peace."

Johnny Eisner: "Okay man in black, then tell me who this lady is in white, and why she can't speak?"

Angel of Death: There's an order to everything, Johnny. You've sensed it and seen it in your own life. Order comes out of rules. There are rules to what's going on here. One of the rules is that my friend here is forbidden to speak. But as I'm obliged to tell you, if you listen.... well, you may hear something."

Johnny Eisner: Starting to rub his arm, “Okay wise guy. Now you were going to tell me your name. Who the hell are you?”

Angel of Death: “This isn’t about hell, Johnny, or for that matter, Heaven. That’s the next bridge in your path. My name (proclaiming it with both arms extended in a sweeping motion to the audience), my name is..... none other than.....(drums are building to a crescendo)

Johnny Eisner: “Okay, Okay. Let’s have it. Who are you? In one word!”

Angel of Death: “I am Death.”

Johnny Eisner: (Startled, he jumps backwards, all the time continuing to rub his arm)
“DEATH! Boy this is one heck of a nightmare I’ve gotten myself into”.

“Then who is that?” (pointing to the figure in white)

Angel of Death: “Johnny, that is Life. But you need to understand that Life cannot speak.”

Johnny Eisner: “So you’re the devil and the good guy can’t talk. Is that it?”

Angel of Death: “You don’t understand. This isn’t who is good and who is bad. That’s not the way it works. I’m here to bring you relief. My companion has another purpose.”

Johnny Eisner: (Grabbing his arm as he is twisted with a blast of pain)
“God! That hurt! What’s going on?”

Angel of Death: “I told you Johnny. We don’t have an unlimited amount of time.”

Johnny Eisner: “I don’t understand”.

Angel of Death: (points to the hospital bed in the other scene. the lights come up enough there for the audience to see the outline of what’s happening)
“Decision time is coming”.

Johnny Eisner: (walking towards the other side of the stage, looking at the scene)
“Is that me?”

Angel of Death: “That’s you, Johnny. The decision time is coming as soon as the morphine wears out. That’s when you make the big decision. Or, if you don’t, someone else is going to make it for you.”

Johnny Eisner: “Its coming back to me. I was in that building, there were those two little kids and no way out. The fireball was coming and there was only one way to protect them... Say, how did those kids come out?”

Angel of Death: (points to the Angel of Life)

Angel of Life: (holds hands out as if to offer something; as her hands open the voices of the other actors can be heard. similar to a flower opening. Now the voices of the two little children can be heard)

Johnny Eisner: “Wow! I can hear those kids talking. They are Okay. Thank God! I guess it’s Okay to use that name, isn’t it?”

Angel of Death: “Of course its Okay. That’s the next stop on the path. People think I’m not part of His team, but that’s false. Death is very much a part of life, and it can often be an act of tremendous kindness.”

Johnny Eisner: “Feeling a little unpopular?”

Angel of Death: “Well, now that you mention it, I don’t get many dinner invitations.”
(pause)
“But..... I do get a lot of requests for gift certificates.”

Johnny Eisner: “Don’t try to get a job as a comedian, pal.”
(turning back to the Angel of Life)
“I can hear those kids talking, but it’s in the future. Their voices have changed. The little boy is going to college. The girl is going to be a great teacher. How can I be hearing that?”

Angel of Death: “Well that is interesting, isn’t it? My white friend here brings to you all the Voices of your life, Johnny. That’s her job. The past, the present, the future. All the voices that constitute what has been, or what will be.”

Johnny Eisner: “So you mean the future isn’t already written?”

Angel of Death: “That’s the way God laid it all out. Johnny, you are writing the future. The voice that God hears is yours. I know this is a little hard when there are too many stars to count, but God made the whole thing, the world, the sky, everything for you. That’s why the only voice that God hears in your world is you. ”

Johnny Eisner: “What about everyone else?”

Angel of Death: "God made a world for each of them also. But all the voices that Life brings to you, they are in some way a part of yours."

Johnny Eisner: (grabbing his arms and his chest)
"Wow, there is another blast of that pain! I guess I got hurt pretty bad."

Angel of Death: "You are right there. In a little while you're going to understand just how bad you really are hurt. But now, you need to make a decision. Do you want to go on, or do you want me to stop the pain?"

Johnny Eisner: (turning toward the white Angel of Life)
"I think I want to hear these voices first. The voices of my life."

Act Two / Scene Three

Setting: The right stage contains Johnny Eisner, the Angel of Death and the Angel of Life. The stage continues to be split from the left, which is the hospital scene, everyone gathered around his bed. As Johnny enters into a dialogue with the Angel of Life, the characters come to the right stage for their role.

Johnny Eisner: Pointing to the woman standing by his bed with her arms around the children. "Look, there's someone who I would like to hear what they have to say."

Angel of Death: "Ah..... June. The girl you fell in love with as a young man, the girl that you married, the mother of your children."

Johnny Eisner: "Yeah!! She came! June is here. Look at that would you?, she's right by my bed!"

Angel of Death: “June..... the girl that grew into the woman that you.... divorced!”

Johnny Eisner: “June became an alcoholic. I couldn’t control her, she was a danger to the children. When they were small, she left them in a car in front of a bar. It was a bad side of town. The kids were there most of the night. When I finally got there, I found her upstairs.....”

June: (now appearing in the active stage, standing by the Angel of Life. Life holds her hands open, as if opening a book. In reality what the Angel of Life is opening is a heart. The Angel of Life is the communication pathway.)

“Johnny. The kids called so I came. I’m so sorry you’re hurt. We don’t know if you are going to live or die.”

Johnny Eisner: “I’m glad you came. I didn’t know the kids knew how to find you. I don’t seem to fully understand what’s going on..... June, it’s so good to see you. Do you remember when we went to the prom? Wow! I had my Dad’s Chevy and you had on that pink dress....”

June: (laughing)

“You mean until you got it off of me. Yeah...that was some night. Do you remember how drunk we got?”

Johnny Eisner: (serious tone, reflecting on the past, trying to remember)

“No..., I mean I remember that we had a few beers. I guess come to think of it, you had quite a few more than I did. Is that when the.... when the drinking started?”

June: “Johnny, I was getting into my Dad’s liquor when I was 14. I always liked a little “blast”. We sure had some good times, didn’t we Johnny?”

Johnny Eisner: “We did have some good times, June, there’s three examples right over there of the best times we had.
(pause as Johnny reflects on the past)

“June, we had some bad times too. All those car wrecks, and the times I put you in the hospitals, I”

June: “Yeah. I know, Johnny. I never meant for that stuff to happen. Honest, I never meant for it to. But I’m sober now. At least for awhile.”

Johnny Eisner: “How long? How long you been sober, June?”

June: “Two months this time. A lot better than I’ve done in the last few years. Hey Johnny, maybe after you get out of the hospital we could try it again. You know, you and me. I might make it this time, Johnny. I might.”

Johnny Eisner: “I can’t June. I can’t be hurt like that again. If the kids have some contact with you, which I didn’t know about that’s your right and their right. But June, I can’t hurt like that again. Never.”

June: “Johnny, come on. We could be a family. That time I left the kids in the car...”

Johnny Eisner: “The boys were three and four June. Marnie was only nine. They were on that street most of the night in the cold. Scared little children, June. Hell, even the windows on the car were down. It was ran out of gas. The children had no way to keep warm.”

June: “Johnny, please...”

Johnny Eisner: “June. You were above that bar in bed with two men.”

June: “That’s all pretty foggy. I’d been drinking some and...”

Johnny Eisner: (pause, and then Johnny dries the tears from his eyes) looking at the Angel of Death Johnny speaks, “Oh, this really hurts (holding his chest).”

Angel of Death: “That’s not the fire hurting, Johnny. Its your heart.”

Johnny Eisner: (turning to June) “The police called. They found you in that place with those men. They arrested you because of the children It was only because they knew who I was that the cops called me to come get the kids.”

June: “Come on Johnny, give me a chance. Our life together wasn’t that bad.”

Johnny Eisner: (Johnny wipes more tears away) “June, I’ve never told you before, but those men had an instant camera. When I got there, I found the pictures. I gathered them up, one by one. I got on my knees and I

picked every one of them up. I wasn't strong enough to stand, I was in that much pain. If I hadn't gotten there when I did, they would have put the kids in Juvenile Hall for the night. When we got home, they couldn't quit crying. They all slept in my bed June, the bed that had been ours. I got up and I went to the fireplace, and I burned those pictures one by one. And then June, I burned the pictures from our wedding, and I burned those pictures from the prom. I burned every picture with you in it."

June: "Johnny, I just needed a drink. That was all. Come to think of it, I need one now."

Johnny Eisner: "Bye, June. I wish you the best."

June: "Bye, Johnny. You and the kids are the best."

Setting: (Lights fade to darkness and when they are raised again, June is back at Johnny's bedside. In her place is an older man, with a saw and hammer)

Johnny Eisner: "Dad! Dad, is that you?
(turning to the Angel of Death), "Is my Dad really here?"

Angel of Death: "Yes. Its your Father. The Angel of Life brings you all the voices of your life, Johnny, including the ones like your Father that have already died. Go ahead and talk to him."

Johnny Eisner: "Dad, I'm so glad you're here. There are some things that I'm supposed to be deciding, and I'm not sure what to do. There is so much going on in my head."

Gerald Eisner: (through the Angel of Life who has open palms extended)
"Son. Remember what I always taught you. Do the right thing. Always measure twice, cut once."

Johnny Eisner: "Dad, let's leave the garage and go in the house where we can sit down and talk."

Gerald Eisner: "Not going in now, got some things here in my workshop that need doing. Got to be doing what needs done."

Johnny Eisner: "Dad, I need you."

Gerald Eisner: “Son, don’t get into those sort of things. Be a man. Remember what I’ve always taught you. Every tool in its place is the sound way of finishing every job.”

Johnny Eisner: “You stayed in this garage, your “workshop” when Mom was dying. She wanted you to come to the hospital, but you didn’t. She called crying and you said not to get all emotional. That was the day she died, Dad. You never shed a tear at the funeral either. So Dad, what do you do with your feelings, or do you really have any?”

Gerald Eisner: “I do what I was taught and that’s what you need to do also, Johnny. Now your Mother was being taken care of well at that hospital. I only waited until I got another coat of varnish on that rocker I was doing, and

Johnny Eisner: “And what Dad? What else were you waiting for?”

Gerald Eisner: (Angrily) “I was waiting for your Mother to calm down. All that emotional stuff is for kids.”

Johnny Eisner: “I’ve got to be going, Dad.”

Gerald Eisner: “Remember what I’ve taught you son. Measure twice, cut once. I taught you everything my own Father taught me.”

Johnny Eisner: “Yes. You did, Dad. You did.
Good-bye.”

(Turning towards the Angel of Death)

Johnny Eisner: “Some things don’t change, in life or in death, do they?”

Death: “People don’t change much. The facts don’t change much. The past and the future are a lot alike. Actually, Johnny, you are the only thing you can change. When you do, you’ll find that everything is different. The past, the present and the future.”

Johnny Eisner: “Hey! There’s my boys! My buddies! I can hear them.”

(Enters the two boys, now grown men.)

Johnny Eisner: “Boys! Hey, its me, old Dad. I can’t believe you’re all grown up and everything. So what’s going on? Tell me about your lives.”

Chip Eisner: “Dad, is that you? But you’ve been dead for so many years. How can you be here?”

Johnny Eisner: “Pretty hard to explain, but I am here. Looks like you guys have stayed friends for life. I’m really glad to see that. So, tell me about your lives, boys.”

Bud Eisner: “We joined the department, Dad, following in your footsteps I guess. Chip and me get together every Friday night to have a few beers and a few laughs. I guess that’s about our life.”
(both are laughing)

Johnny Eisner: “So boys, what I meant was what about your families? Your friends? You know..... what became of your life?”

Chip Eisner: “Well, Dad, Bud’s got him a little gal knocked up at his house so that’s slowed him down quite a bit. But I dumped that old nag of mine and I’m having a hell of a good time. Plenty of beer and at least one different woman a week. Me and Bud have been keeping score on how many different gals we’ve laid. Since he’s slowed down at least a little, I’ve been catching up.”

Johnny Eisner: “Boys... maybe you’re not quite through growing up. I’d better be going now.” (as Death pulls on his sleeve)

(Johnny turns to address Death as his sons fade away)

“They’re still little boys I guess.”

Death: “Johnny, do you want to know if they ever really grow up?”

Johnny Eisner: “I don’t think so. I don’t want to know if they waste their lives.”

Death: “What you mean is you already know. Because there was that inside of you also. Right?”

Johnny Eisner: “Yeah.... maybe so. Once. Maybe I sort of know.”

Setting: The full figured woman now crosses from the stage from the hospital bed scene on the screen to the left, now on the right. She and Johnny rush to each other and engage in a very passionate, overtly sexual kiss. His hand extends down past her waist.

Sherry: “Johnny, baby!! You’ve got that spark going I see.” Laughing and tossing her blonde (bleach blonde) hair back, she speaks, “Like I’ve always said, that’s the part about you that I like the best.”

Johnny Eisner: “Oh honey, I’m so glad to see you. I’m in the middle of the strangest dream and I can’t seem to break out of it. But like I told you honey, now we’re going to get married soon and then..... and then.....” (Johnny is nearly bent over with pain)

Sherry: “I’m in a weird dream myself, baby. I dreamed I was by your bed in the hospital and there had been this terrible accident and the doctor said that you’d never be your old self. Can you image that? Not be my big strong lover boy?”

Johnny Eisner: “Sherry, I hate to say it, but I think that doctor might know what he’s talking about. My weird friends here seem to be showing me some things maybe I’ve never heard before. These jolts of pain seem to be getting a lot worse. But don’t worry, it will be me that comes back. I love you, honey, big time!”

Sherry: “What do you mean it might not be the same as before?”

Johnny Eisner: “Well I’d be the same. It would still be me, but I might not be as spry as maybe I used to”.

Sherry: “But we’d still go dancing every Saturday night, wouldn’t we?”

Johnny Eisner: “Maybe we could find some other things.....”

Sherry: (anxiously)
“But we’d still go jogging and then have all that great sex afterwards? Right, Johnny?”

Johnny Eisner: “We’d still be able to show each other how much we care. We’d make love but without all the sex.”

Sherry: “Well it’s not like it’s only the sex, although Johnny you’re the very best in bed there ever could be. But, Johnny, what do you mean we could make love without sex? I mean, Johnny, you’re still gonna be the man you’ve always been?”

Johnny Eisner: “I need you, Sherry. I need you like I’ve never needed you before.”

Sherry: “I need you, Johnny, but I need you exactly like I’ve always needed you before.”

Johnny Eisner: “But through it all we could grow in how we feel.”

Sherry: “Through it all.... what does that mean, Johnny? Cause I’m not much into that nursing and bedpans and that sort of stuff, Johnny.”
(pause)
“Johnny, I know exactly the way you make me feel.”
(she moves her hands along her hips in a suggestive motion)
“I love you, Johnny.”

Johnny Eisner: (now doubling over, the pain brings him to his knees)
“I’ve got to go, baby. I need to talk to my new acquaintances.”

(Sherry fades away and Death comes forward as Johnny addresses him)

“This pain is getting unreal!”

Death: “Oh I’m sure that it is. But that wasn’t the pain of the morphine wearing out, that pain was the pain in your heart about Sherry...”

Johnny Eisner: “Shut up! You son of a bitch! Shut up! Sherry does love me.”

Death: “Of course she does, Johnny, but there are as many definitions for that word as there are people, aren’t there?”

Johnny Eisner: “Death, I really don’t like you.”

Death: “Oh, you might not understand but I’m one of the best friends you’ve ever had.”

Johnny Eisner: “Go to hell!!”

Death: “I do. Thousands of times a day.”

Act Two, Scene Four

The right stage now has some of the trappings of the firehouse where Johnny Eisner worked.

Johnny Eisner: “Why are we here? This is the fire station where I worked for 20 years.”

Death: "I know. I wanted you to see what changes those 20 years made"

Johnny Eisner: (Walking over to a wall with a gathering of pictures on the wall of retired chiefs and those firemen that were killed in the line of duty) Pointing to one of the pictures he proclaims "Hey! Lookie there my very dark acquaintance. That's my picture. How far out in the future is this?"

Death: "Its ten years Johnny. Ten years from the day that you gave your life to save those two kids."

Johnny Eisner: "Then I'm a hero right? So that's pretty good."

Death: "Johnny, the only heroes that stay famous forever are those who are heroes to the people they love. Watch."

Two young fireman come walking up to the pictures. They cannot see Johnny Eisner and the Angel of Death. One of the young men has a dust cloth, the other a mop.

1st young fireman: "I hate this clean up duty. Why do they pick on the young guys? I joined this place to fight fires, not wipe the dust off old men that nobody remembers."

2nd young fireman: "Yeah..... it makes you wonder who these old farts really were. I guess it don't matter. It was a different world before women got to be firemen."

Johnny Eisner: (Again he reacts physically to the sensation of pain) "Oh God, this hurts more and more! They don't even know who I was. I guess I maybe don't know who the other guys are on that wall myself. But still, I was a hero. Right?"

Death: "You still are a hero Johnny. But things pass at work. You will always be a hero to those two kids you saved and to your own kids for doing it."

Johnny Eisner: "So what's your point?"

Death: "A farmer spends his whole life in love with the land. He thinks he owns it. But it owns him. His scratching in the dirt, he thinks changes the land. But it doesn't. The work was there for him to enjoy it. Can you understand that? The sky is always the same. The land will return to its natural state, long after it has claimed the body of the farmer who thought he owned it."

Johnny Eisner: "That's not a very positive thought."

Death: "It is when you understand it, Johnny. That's the way all of Life works. The trip is about learning to understand. Some people just don't make it all the way. They never get it all figured out. But you, you've been lucky. You're getting to make a choice, to reflect on it all. You've got me to help you."

Johnny Eisner: "Wow! This pain thing is getting out of control! So I'm lucky because Death, because you are my friend?"

Death: "Johnny you're lucky because you got a life. No matter how this comes out you're going to understand more than most people do."

Johnny Eisner: "The more I think about it, the more I think you are a sorry son of a bitch. I think it wasn't you at all that was the teacher. It was the pain that taught me the lessons."

Death: "You're half right, you're halfway there."

Johnny Eisner: "And what was the other half?"

Death: "You know in your heart already, but I'll give you a little extra help. Its the Love, Johnny. That was the other half."

Johnny Eisner: (Looking back at the other stage, watching what is going on)
"That morphine is really losing its punch now. I'm going to become conscious soon."

Death: "You're exactly right. That doctor is going to ask you a question. It's not the most important question of your life though. Life and death decisions are the easy ones. It is the day by day question of "who am I?" that forms a life. Not how or when we die".

Johnny Eisner: "Are you sure we shouldn't be talking about that Heaven and Hell thing?"

Death: "Johnny, that's past the doors we're opening now. This is about your life, and the end of your life is only another part of it."

Johnny Eisner: "Now how is it that I end all of this?"

Death: (Holding up his hand with a large knife in it)
"You take this knife, and stab my associate here in the white that has brought you all these voices."

Johnny Eisner: "Why didn't you bring the voices, Death?"

Death: "Because that's the real difference between life and death; in death there is only silence. Life ends when all the voices stop. Life ends when the only voice we hear is God's and our own. Time is short, Johnny. Are you ready to make a decision?"

Johnny Eisner: "I'd like to talk to my daughter first, is there time for that?"

Death: "If you hurry."

(His daughter Marnie comes across to the right side of the stage. She and Johnny embrace.)

Johnny Eisner: "Dearest Marnie. How's my girl that's so very much like her old Dad?"

Marnie: "Daddy I'm Okay. But I am sure frightened. I can't figure out what's going on. Who are these two scary guys in the robes?"

Johnny Eisner: "I'm trying to figure that out myself. The only thing I'm sure of is that at least one of them is my friend."

Marnie: "Dad, are you going to be Okay?"

Johnny Eisner: "Yes, things will work out somehow. Would you like to know about you? About what your life will become?"

Death: "Its time to make that decision Johnny."

Act Three / Scene One

Setting: The stage has transferred the light back to the hospital (left) side of the stage. The right side is partially lit, and the lights on the right side come up.

Dr. Manning: "He's almost conscious. Now remember what I told you all. I'm going to ask him what he wants and we're going to follow his instructions to the point at which we can."

(those around the hospital bed are talking to each other)
"He's coming to. His eyes are about to open."

(the right side of the stage)

Death: “Got your decision made yet?” (as he hands Johnny the knife)

Johnny Eisner: “Wait. Did you hear what Life just whispered? Why did Life say that so quietly?”

Death: “Remember I told you Johnny that Life would bring you all the voices of your life. The voices of the past, the present and the future. Well, some voices are very quiet because the person speaking is so small.”

(Johnny takes the knife from Death into his hand and appears to be listening to Life as he turns towards the Angel of Life.)

(left side of the stage)

Dr. Manning: “Johnny, this is your doctor. You’ve been burned very badly. Your family is here with me and we need you to tell us what it is you want us to do. If I stop the pain it will very probably shorten your life because the pain medicine suppresses your heart and lungs. If I stop the pain medicine, the pain you are experiencing now will only continue and get worse. Do you understand what I’m asking?”

(Johnny Eisner is nodding yes, his wrapped face in the hospital bed)

People around the bed: “He’s nodding yes. He understands.”

Death: “Make your decision. Embrace me and I’ll take away the pain of your life.”

(Johnny Eisner comes close to the white Angel of Life and listens as Life continues its whisper. Turning away from Life; it appears that Johnny has stabbed Life in the back. Then Johnny turns into the open arms of Death and embraces Death.)

(On the left side (hospital room side) of the stage Johnny jerks up to a sitting position in bed)

Johnny Eisner: (shouting)
“I want to Live!! I need to Live!!”

(Coming back to the right side of the stage Johnny is pushed away from Death which he was holding in embrace. Death has the knife plunged in his back.)

Death: "Cheating Death are we, Johnny? You're not the first person who has tried."

(Johnny is facing the hospital side of the stage as those lights start to dim.)

Act Four, Scene One

(Nineteen years later. Johnny's daughter Marnie appears at the center of a new stage setting. It is a kitchen scene)

Marnie: addressing the audience,
"Dad has really suffered all these years. The pain from the fire has been horrible. All the surgeries, the skin grafts, the physical therapy; all of it has been a horrible price for him to pay. He can barely walk, even with his two canes. He lives in the back room off our kitchen. He hardly ever comes out. But he never complains. He seems to have some purpose to his remaining life, but I don't know what it is. My brothers are grown men now and they don't come by to see Dad much. My Mother passed away soon after the accident from physcrosis of the liver. Dad's girlfriend became a stewardess and lived in Europe with a polo player.

He was hurt in an accident, she left him, and now she's a cocktail waitress in Las Vegas. I love Dad and I'm glad he's here. My husband Bill and our two girls don't mind either."

Setting: The room becomes dark. There is a long pause as Marnie has left the stage. Part of the kitchen table is particularly dark. A telephone rings and rings and rings. Marnie reenters the stage, this time dressed in a nightgown and robe.

Marnie answering the phone: "Sorry it took me so long to answer, but its 3:00 in the morning. Yes, this is Police Lieutenant's wife. Yes, we have two young daughters. But my husband is not here. He's with our girls at a girl scout snow skiing trip."

(there is a pause)

Marnie: "Oh my God!! What do you mean there's been an accident? Yes we do have blue van. What do you mean it slid off the road? It exploded in fire..... ? My husband..... no one survived?"

Are you sure?"

(a long pause and then Marnie, grief stricken sets the phone down. She goes to a kitchen cabinet, takes out a huge pistol, puts it in the middle of the kitchen table. Then she goes to the middle of the stage and addresses the audience.)

Marnie: "There's no reason for me to keep on living. My husband and my two girls are my whole life. There is nothing to live for."

Setting: As Marnie goes to the kitchen table and sits down looking at the gun, the Angel of Death appears.

(Marnie reaches out to take the pistol in the middle of the table. She moves her hand very slowly and just as she reaches the pistol, the hand of her Father reaches out from the darkness to stop her. The lights come up showing him seated at the dark area of the table, fully dressed)

Johnny Eisner: "Wait!!"

Marnie: "Dad. What are you doing here? Bill and the girls have been killed in an auto accident. Don't stop me, Dad! There's no reason for me to go on."

(The Angel of Death comes closer.)

Johnny Eisner: "You're wrong! They are alive! The phone will ring in two minutes and they will tell you that Bill and the girls got out of the van before it caught fire. They are holding onto the side of a cliff and a man will rescue them. They are Okay Marnie! They are Okay. I know it."

Marnie: (crying / distraught / despondent)
"Dad, is this all some bad dream? Why are you even up?"

Johnny Eisner: "Because this is the reason that I've lived the last nineteen years. Wait, only two minutes."

(silence on the stage for two minutes as Death comes closer)

(silence broken by the loud ringing of the phone)

(Marnie answers the phone)

"Really? Are you sure they are Okay? Can I talk to my husband?"

“Bill!! My God are you and girls Okay? They said you were dead.

(a pause) you mean a man rescued you and the girls.....

“I’m leaving now. I can be there in a few hours. Yes.... I’ll be careful”.

Marnie: “Dad, how did you know? What’s this all about?”

Johnny Eisner: “I know you can’t understand this, but years ago, when I was in that hospital bed, just before I came to and told the Doctor to stop the pain medicine, there was a voice that I heard. That voice took me to this night, waiting here in the dark, knowing exactly what was going to happen. It was my reason for living, for living through all that pain.”

Marnie: “Dad, you heard me? You heard me from all that time ago. You suffered all that pain for me?”

Johnny Eisner: “No, honey. Although I would have endured it if you had asked me. But I don’t think if you would have known the pain I went through, you would have asked.”

Marnie: “Then Dad I still don’t understand whose voice you heard?”

Johnny Eisner: “I barely heard it, Marnie. The voice was so tiny. It was the voice of your unborn child. A child that you don’t even know that you are carrying.”

Marnie: “Dad. This is all crazy. Bill and I can’t have any more children. After all those miscarriages, the doctors said it was impossible.”

Johnny Eisner: “Marnie, the voice is only a few days old. But it was a voice I recognized. The voice of your love, and Bill’s, and your Mother’s and mine. The voice I heard was the whisper of Life. My purpose was to save that life.”

Marnie: “Dad. This is all crazy. You need to go to bed. I’ve got to go get Bill and the girls.”

(pausing at the door she turns back to him, smiling a huge smile)

“Do you really think it could be possible I’m pregnant again?”

Johnny Eisner: “You got your boy baby. Your unborn child is a boy.”

(they meet in the middle of the room to hug each other)

Marnie: “Get on to bed Dad.” (going to the door)

Johnny Eisner: “I’m meeting a friend.”
 (But Marnie doesn’t hear as she has already gone)

The kitchen scene leaves only the Angel of Death and Johnny Eisner alone in the room. Johnny gets up, pulls a suitcase out from under the table and speaks to Death.

Johnny Eisner: “Well, you’ve returned, old friend. I hope there are no hard feelings.”

Death: “You’re not the first person who cheated Death, Johnny. Nor will you be the last. Nor do I care, Johnny, for Death has no feelings, no emotions except the greatest loneliness you can imagine. For the only voices from Life that I hear are always someone else’s.”

Johnny Eisner: (Lifting his bag, moving forward towards Death)
 “My bag is packed, I’m ready to go.”

(Death comes forward, picks up the gun off the table)
(Slowly, Death points the gun at Johnny)

Death: “One last question, Johnny. Why? Why did you do it? Both times you sacrificed yourself. Put yourself through all that pain, knowing exactly how much it was going to hurt. Excruciating, unrelenting pain. Why?”

Johnny Eisner: “The voices..... they were children. They were weak, I was strong. They had no one else. You want an answer, that’s it. I did it cause I could hear the voice of a defenseless child. I’m no hero. It was cause they were kids.”

Death: “And the pain Johnny? How did you endure the pain?”

Johnny Eisner: “When there is a purpose, a reason for our life, we can endure any amount of pain.”

(Holding the gun for some moments, Death slowly lowers it and returns the gun to the cabinet)

Death: “One of the perks of my job, Johnny. I get to extend the time. I’ll be back someday. Sometime in the future, after that unborn boy has played in a few ball games that you get to watch. Next time though, I’ll come while you are asleep. I’ll hold you as gently as you will hold that new grandchild. For you see, Johnny, I’ve come to Love you. Can you imagine that? In my line of work, you can’t

get emotionally involved. I lied to you, Johnny. Death does have feelings.”

(Death turns and goes to the door to leave)

Johnny Eisner: “Hey Death! Before you go, there’s a question I want to ask you.”

Death: “What question?”

Johnny Eisner: “How’d you get this job, this job being the Angel of Death? You were an angel before weren’t you?”

Death: “Yes, I was before.”

Johnny Eisner: “You asked for it didn’t you?”

Death: “Yes. I asked for it. Actually I prayed for it.”

Johnny Eisner: “Let me guess, it had something to do with children..., with your children.”

(pause)

Death: “They were weak, I was strong.
They were suffering, scared and in pain.
It was the only way I could save them.
And Johnny.....”

Johnny Eisner: “Yeah.”

Death: “It was then I learned that every child that suffers is our own.
That’s something you learned a long time ago.”

Johnny Eisner: “Thanks Death. Thanks for everything.”

Death: “Johnny, you are a hero. The measure of our lives is the voices we choose to hear and what we do about them. You got it all figured out, Johnny. About needing a purpose in life; about how people can only love in the way that they know it to be. When you chose to hear the voices of the weak, that’s when you became a hero.”

Johnny Eisner: “Maybe you’re right, old friend.”

Death: “One last little gift from Death, Johnny. Did you recognize the voice on the phone? The voice that made the second phone call. It

was the Fireman that went over the side of that cliff and saved Bill and the girls. Did you recognize that voice?"

Johnny Eisner:

"Why, no. What do you mean did I recognize that voice?"

Death:

"It was the little boy that you saved in that apartment fire so long ago, Johnny. He grew up and became a Fireman. He was the one that went down the side of that cliff without a safety harness just in time to save Bill and the girls."

(The Angel of Life appears on the side of the stage, walking away hand in hand with the Angel of Death. They walk across the front of the stage as it darkens and the Angel of Life speaks for the only time, speaking to the audience)

Angel of Life:

"Our Loves are the Voices of Our Life."