

**SAINT LOUISE, PRAY FOR US**  
Maggie Smith-Smith

“If you look for perfection, you’ll never be content.”  
-Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

## CHARACTERS

GEN - a twenty-two-year-old college drop-out, an oldest sister with “only child energy”; lighthearted and carefree, the charismatic sibling used to all of the attention on her

TONI - an eighteen-year-old busybody; sets her mind on an objective and follows through, decides to get her youngest sister canonized as a saint upon her unexpected death

LOUISE - a recently deceased sixteen-year-old, seemingly perfect but harboring guilt enough for three people; remembered as a symbol of purity and perfection

EMMA - Gen’s friend from high school, a source of comfort and understanding

MARY - mother of the Coughlin family, grieving the loss of her youngest daughter and attempting to carry on; a woman in need of help no one around her can give

TYLER - a boy in Louise’s class; carrying the weight of a five-year-old secret and thousands of dollars in cash

BISHOP CAMPBELL - a bishop recruited by Toni; knows when enough is enough

## NOTES

I am sorry in advance for spoiling the ending of *Little Women*. I, too, had the end of *Little Women* spoiled for me, whilst reading the book *Mary Anne and the Bad Luck Mystery* by Ann M. Martin. In Ann’s defense, I shouldn’t have been reading both books at once. Also, the book is from 1869, so really it’s anyone but Ann’s fault at that point. That being said: Maybe read *Little Women* before reading this play if you would not like the book to be spoiled.

As usual, there shouldn’t be any restrictions with race in this play. The family doesn’t need to be one race. You’re not being “realistic.” You’re just being an asshole.

I struggle with finding a way to describe how gender fits into this piece. These characters are simply characters. They can (and should) be played in many different ways. The play has **NOT** been written so that these characters can only be portrayed as cisgender. The world is made up of many beautiful people of many different identities that need to be explored more in theatre. While this play does not necessarily focus on gender identity as one of its core themes, I encourage performers to explore it as it pertains to this piece if they believe it to be one of the elements of their performance in the role!

**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE ONE**  
**THE INTERSECTION OF HUMOR AND TRAUMA**

*[We see nothing but a cushioned chair, everything else dark around it. GEN sits, cross-legged, holding her journal. She doesn't read from it.]*

GEN

There was this one night with my sister, we were driving home. Well, I was the one driving. And she was looking out of the window, just taking in the surroundings— I had gotten us lost, so she was just watching. And we're driving through this neighborhood and all of the sudden I hear her shout at me to stop driving. And, of course, me being me, I don't. It wasn't my fault, she didn't tell me why I needed to stop. It turns out I should have, because I hit this possum in the middle of the road. No idea how she saw it and I didn't, she must have just sensed it, she's always had a way with animals. But I didn't know and so I didn't stop. And, you know, it being a possum and we being a three-thousand pound piece of machinery, it wouldn't surprise you to know that we did, in fact, hit the possum. And it didn't die. Not right away. Severely wounded, yeah. And so she gets out of the car and looks at this maimed possum and, like, tries to pick it up. I stopped her, but she keeps trying to pick it up. She said we could still save it. But, I mean, you and I both look at this possum and we know that it's not looking good. I'd say it was on its last legs, but I broke them all with the car. And I'm trying to tell her that the best thing to do is put it out of its misery, and she thinks the best thing to do is to bring it into the car and bring it home or the vet. And so I tell her, "Louise, there's nothing we can do for the guy. We can either make this quick for him or we can let him suffer." And so we're arguing back and forth about the best option, and I'm telling her we can just run it over again, or she could use her hands if she felt like that would be more humane. And then we look down and we realize the possum died while we were still deciding. And I think that story symbolizes our relationship, what do you think?

*[Full lights come up on the basement of the Coughlin Family, TONI sitting on the carpeted floor, wide-eyed and disgusted.]*

TONI

I think that's a shitty way to open a eulogy.

GEN

You told me to speak from the heart. And my heart said tell the possum story.

TONI

Did your heart also say to traumatize every single person in the room even more than they already are?

GEN

It's not trauma if it's funny. Trauma and humor don't mix.

TONI

I'm staring the intersection of trauma and humor in the face.

GEN

That feels uncalled for.

TONI

You can't use the possum story in the eulogy, it paints Louise in a poor light.

GEN

Well, maybe that's what she needs? Everyone has these happy, perfect, pure memories of her. Why not throw in something gritty? Local teenager kneeling in street gravel, found by mother, cradling a dead possum.

TONI

Wait, Mom was holding the dead possum?

GEN

What? No, Louise was.

TONI

Okay, well if that's the case, then you need to work on your sentence structure.

GEN

Sentence structure, who gives a shit about / sentence structure?

TONI

The way you said it implied that Mom was the one / cradling the dead possum.

GEN

Okay, but anyone listening to the story would clearly know that Louise would be the only one carrying / the possum.

TONI

The way you phrased it made it sound like it would be the headline to a newspaper article, no one would understand that if they only / read the—

GEN

Okay, okay, okay. Who cares about the sentence structure— More importantly, who cares about the eulogy?

TONI

Everyone attending the funeral.

GEN

It's what Louise would want.

TONI

The funeral isn't for Louise.

GEN

I'm sorry, did another relative die while I was writing this eulogy?

TONI

What? No, I just meant that it's not like Louise'll hear any of the jokes you make.

GEN

And here I thought you were a good Catholic who believed in Heaven.

TONI

I do, don't start spreading rumors. I just mean that, like, it's more for people to remember Louise.

GEN

And what better way to remember her than—

TONI

Than what? The jarring image of her covered in possum blood in the middle of some street?

GEN

I wouldn't say jarring.

TONI

It's been in my head since you read the eulogy, it's jarring.

GEN

I genuinely can't see what the problem is.

TONI

A eulogy's supposed to be— Look, it's, like, you're helping everyone remember her.

GEN

She died less than a week ago, no one's going to have trouble remembering her.

TONI

What about the people who didn't know her?

GEN

Do you crash funerals often?

TONI

No, like, the little kids dragged to it by their parents. Distant family members that Mom invites but none of us expect to come. People like that.

GEN

Then I'm not really helping them remember her, I'm telling them about her.

TONI

Yeah, exactly. You're creating a legacy for Louise.

GEN

I feel like that's a lot of pressure for a twenty minute speech.

TONI

Every time you speak I struggle even more with understanding why Mom asked you to write this.

GEN

Could be my charming personality.

TONI

Yeah, or your inability to see through any other job. But maybe I'm wrong, I haven't heard the whole thing yet. Keep going.

GEN

What?

TONI

Keep reading. You know, the eulogy.

GEN

Oh, that was it. I haven't finished.

TONI

You haven't fin— The funeral's tomorrow.

GEN

I mean, sure, now that it's midnight—

TONI

You said you had twenty minutes.

GEN

Still need to write about seventeen of them.

TONI

You're an idiot.

GEN

No tarot deck is complete without The Fool.

TONI

Yeah, unfortunately it's not complete without Death, either. Finish the eulogy.

GEN

Great, I'll start on that right now. Real quick— How do you spell sacrilegious— Is there two or three I's?



TONI

Are you joking?

GEN

Depends, are you going to tell me how to spell it?

TONI

No.

GEN

Totally joking.

TONI

I'm going to bed.

GEN

Will you read the draft when I'm done?

TONI

I'm terrified to know what would happen if I don't.

*[TONI exits, leaving GEN to herself.]*

**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE TWO**  
**GOOD MOURNING**

*[A transition into a spotlight on GEN. She is dressed in black, holding up a piece of paper. A continuation of her eulogy, but she's gone rogue, as she is wont to do.]*

GEN

...And I think that symbolizes our relationship. And it's so weird to think she's gone, right? I was on the phone with her less than twenty-four hours before she died. She had this whole life planned for her, you know? She'd talk about how she wanted to major in English, and how she had kids— God, she wanted to get married right out of college. And, you know, so many people I know are getting married. Or engaged, I guess is a better word. And it sucks to think that Louise won't get to do that. But I keep thinking, well, we don't really know if they're getting married, right? I mean, for all we know they could end it the day after the proposal. Or three months in. Or one of them could drop out the day of the wedding. You never know. Life just throws these curveballs at you. And Louise was telling me about people doing this in her grade. Sophomores and juniors in high school. You don't grow up thinking you'll get engaged at, like, sixteen. And that's the age I'm talking about! These kids I see promising themselves to each other are sixteen! How are they going to buy a house? How will they buy a car? Will the house even have a garage? Are they getting cats? There's so many unanswered questions. And, I mean, I just think it's young. We're so young. It's young, right? Making these big decisions at such a young age, what we want to study, what we want to do for the rest of our lives. It's overwhelming. I mean, if you died at sixteen, everyone would say that you died young. Right?

*[There's a pause. GEN looks at the casket that holds her sister, sixteen and dead.]*

GEN

Ah. I see now that I've said the wrong thing. Louise was a good person, wasn't she? Died so... Young.

*[The lights go back up, and GEN walks into the basement. TONI and EMMA sit on the couch, both dressed in black.]*

EMMA

There she is.

GEN

Why are you down here? There's, like, a hundred people upstairs asking for Toni.

TONI  
Why don't you talk to them, then?

GEN  
None of them want to talk to me.

TONI  
Oh, whyever not?

GEN  
Shut up.

*[GEN sits on the beanbag chair, putting her head in her hands.]*

GEN  
God, everyone hates me.

TONI  
Oh, they hate you so much.

GEN  
Sounds about right.

EMMA  
I thought Toni proofread your speech.

TONI  
That wasn't the speech I proofread. Gen didn't even look down at the paper for that, she just started talking.

GEN  
It's a habit I have.

EMMA  
I've noticed.

TONI  
You know what the best part was? When the priest just didn't ask if anyone wanted to share any memories they had of Louise. Just skipped over it. Why do you think that was?

EMMA

Because he has common sense.

GEN

I have common sense. I just also have anxiety.

EMMA

Remind me not to ask you to give my eulogy.

TONI

That's implying she doesn't get killed by one of our relatives. Did you see Great-Aunt Sarah? She looked appalled. Gen, you sounded drunk.

EMMA

I've never seen a priest ask someone to hurry up a eulogy.

TONI

If I were you I genuinely would never speak again.

GEN

Thanks.

TONI

God, and you just kept talking. After. What was it you said? "If I end up dying this young...?"

GEN

If I end up dying this young I'd want to be taxidermied.

TONI

Were there any real thoughts going through your head when you were speaking?

EMMA

I mean, it could've been worse.

GEN

Worse than reminding everyone how young she was?

TONI

Or how dead she is?

EMMA

She could have knocked the casket over.

GEN

Might as well have.

EMMA

But I don't think I've ever had a harder time trying not to laugh.

GEN

I made you laugh?

TONI

Oh, you made a lot of people laugh. Just none of the right people.

GEN

Every living relative is definitely plotting my murder as we speak.

EMMA

Maybe. But Louise would've loved it. Didn't she make a funeral scrapbook when she was, like, thirteen?

GEN

Yeah. Something about wanting to make it perfect.

TONI

I don't think "morbid eulogy" was on the list for that.

GEN

No, probably not.

EMMA

Honestly, it's okay. It was awful. But it's okay.

GEN

Thank you. Your validation is meaningless. But thank you.

*[There's a natural lull in the conversation.]*

GEN

Want to sneak out to get milkshakes and sit on a playground?

*[The three immediately and silently agree, stand up, and leave the room.]*

**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE THREE**  
**ONE GINGERBREAD MAN SHORT OF A CANDYLAND BOARD**

*[Transition where MARY COUGHLIN sits in the basement, boxes full of LOUISE'S belongings surrounding her. She is dressed in everyday clothes. The funeral has passed. She sorts through the boxes, muttering to herself for as long as it takes for the performer playing GEN to change clothes. GEN enters, also dressed in a non-funeral outfit. MARY holds up a sweater to show GEN.]*

MARY

Keep? Or throw away?

GEN

It's got a hole in the sleeve.

MARY

So toss it?

GEN

It's not a big hole.

MARY

We can't keep doing this with everything. You're here to help me.

GEN

No, I'm here because I got a call in the middle of the night saying my sister was found dead at the scene of a car accident.

MARY

That, too. Now, can you make a decision.

GEN

You're the one asking me about every choice you're making with her stuff.

MARY

You're her sister, you knew her well.

GEN

And you're her mother. You knew her well-er.

MARY

*[Correcting]* Knew her better.

GEN

Louise wouldn't care if you threw out some old cardigan that's barely big enough to fit me or Toni.

*[A pause as MARY assesses the sweater.]*

MARY

I'm keeping it.

GEN

Mom.

MARY

What? I get to keep a box of her things, that's what we agreed on.

GEN

Yeah, and then that box is going to turn into two, which'll turn into five, which'll turn into you renting out a storage unit by the month to keep all of her things in.

MARY

I'm housing and feeding you right now, you don't get to object to my healing.

GEN

Noted.

*[Another pause as MARY goes through more items, making quicker decisions about where the items go.]*

MARY

Speaking of, when are you going back?



GEN

Oh, um, not for a while.

MARY

Meaning?

GEN

I talked to my professors about everything. They're agreeing to record lectures for me while I handle stuff here. Something about, uh, my wellbeing? And being there for me in my time of need? That I'm loved and supported and they care for me deeply.

MARY

The semester just started, they hardly know you.

GEN

What can I say? My reputation precedes me.

MARY

As long as you can still graduate in May.

*[TONI enters.]*

TONI

You're still doing this?

MARY

Yes. It's an ordeal.

TONI

What, you're just looking for clothing that doesn't fit or is torn apart. It's not that hard.

MARY

No, we're sorting through everything.

TONI

Why?

MARY

Because we need to get rid of some of it.

TONI

No. No we don't. We don't need to get rid of anything.

GEN

It's taking up space.

TONI

So do you, but we don't throw you out.

GEN

Sure, great. Why don't you go through the "Get Rid Of" pile and make sure nothing valuable is missing, and then when you're done you can go through the trash bag upstairs and make sure I didn't accidentally toss out any important food scraps by mistake.

TONI

This isn't a joke.

*[MARY holds up a stuffed bear.]*

MARY

Its seams are tearing in the back and its eye's popped out.

GEN

Toss it.

TONI

No, that's Reginald!

MARY

She barely even touched it after middle school.

TONI

I'm sorry, I forgot that putting something in a closet for years means it doesn't exist. Silly me, thinking the women in this house understood object permanence.

MARY

Toni, it's falling apart.

TONI

Because he was loved fiercely.

GEN

Yes. And he'll be missed fiercely, too.

TONI

He was her best friend.

GEN

People outgrow friends.

TONI

She wouldn't want you to throw him away.

MARY

Fine, you keep it, then. But make sure you fix it up, I don't want to find its stuffing hiding behind the couch.

*[MARY holds up a Candyland set.]*

GEN

We have one upstairs.

TONI

That one's Louise's, though.

MARY

Louise played with the one we have in the game cabinet, too.

TONI

But this one's her's.

MARY

There are pieces missing.

TONI

Yeah, because she used the little gingerbread men as kids in her dollhouse.

MARY

She did?

TONI

Do you seriously not remember?

MARY

I have three kids, Toni, you're lucky I remember your birthday.

TONI

She would take them out of the box and forget to put them back. That's why you got her that game board, so then she'd stop taking the pieces out of the one from the cabinet.

MARY

Oh, I guess I did.

TONI

Why don't you let me go through this?

MARY

I'm fully capable of sorting out her things.

TONI

You almost got rid of Reginald and Candyland!

MARY

And I still don't fully understand why we can't.

TONI

Because it's Louise! It's a part of her! Look, you still have all of her stuff and you're already forgetting all about her.

GEN

All the more reason we can toss it.

MARY

Stop it.

*[The silence is uncomfortable.]*

GEN

Did you see the high school's doing a memorial?

MARY

The second one this year.

GEN

Second?

TONI

They found Tyler Hyde at the school one morning in November. They think he jumped.

GEN

And I just didn't hear about this?

TONI

Well, I didn't know him and Louise hadn't really seen the Hydes since she was, like, eleven.

MARY

That poor family.

TONI

They didn't come to Louise's funeral.

MARY

They're grieving.

TONI

They've had months to grieve. My sister's body is still warm.

GEN

It snowed yesterday, so probably not.

MARY

Antonia Coughlin. They buried two children before either of them turned eighteen, show some sympathy.

GEN

Oh, shit, Riley.

No cursing.

MARY

It's not like we have any children around.

GEN

Gen.

MARY

Did Louise, like, ever talk about that?

GEN

No.

TONI

I would have.

GEN

Yeah? And you can say that with confidence? Using all of your experience of seeing someone die when you were eleven?

TONI

I don't need to experience it to know what I would have done.

GEN

Shut up.

TONI

Therapy is good for you.

GEN

Louise was in therapy.

MARY

Way to go, dipshit.

TONI

What did she talk about?

GEN

MARY

I never asked. Just told her I was there to listen if she needed someone. But that door was closed.

*[A beat. None of the girls know what to say.]*

MARY

Okay, Toni, how about this.

*[MARY searches through the boxes and finds a stack of journals. She hands them to TONI.]*

MARY

Is this enough to remember her by?

TONI

What, notebooks?

GEN

Look who can't remember, now. She used to write in her journal, like, every day.

MARY

Does that sound good? You can keep those journals. I'll look through the rest of this and find the important stuff.

TONI

That works.

MARY

Good. And when you go up can you take one of those boxes for me? I'm probably moving all of this up to the living room now that all of the guests are gone.

*[TONI grabs a box and carries it out, placing the journals on top of it.]*

GEN

Intense.

MARY

She's happy you're home.

GEN

Seems like it's stressing her out even more.

MARY

There was a solid day where it was just me and her. I think she's glad she has someone else making noise in the house.

GEN

She makes enough noise on her own.

MARY

She doesn't, really. She's rarely talking, now.

GEN

Yeah, but before that?

MARY

She was shut up in her room most of the time. Get home after school and wouldn't come out until dinner. Then after dinner she'd do the same.

GEN

Always working.

MARY

Always working. A lot like Louise.

GEN

Yeah.

*[MARY looks around the room.]*

MARY

Five more boxes. Think we can get them done tonight?

GEN

Absolutely not.

MARY

Me neither. Help me take them upstairs.

*[GEN and MARY pick up the boxes, balancing them as they make their way upstairs.]*