

## “The Mall” Character Descriptions

Crones 1 and 2: Two old women who sit on a boardwalk, seeking in the faces and actions of humanity reassuring proof of life’s futility. The Crones have decided to let life pass them by, and they would never admit to a feeling of loss.

Matrons 1 and 2: Two middle-aged women stuck in a mundane hell who discuss only such things as the weather or their diets.

Barney: A large, 40 year old man just out from a psychiatric ward. He bears an unrequited love for the uninterested Clara and vests in her his hopes for future happiness.

Dell: A small, 40 year old man and companion of Barney who is present to support and warn Barney from his doomed feelings for Clara.

Girl: A lovely young woman, naive idealistic, and in love with the Sailor. One half of the archetypal ‘Lover’ pair.

Sailor: A handsome young man, naive, idealistic, and in love with the Girl. The other half of the archetypal ‘Lover’ pair.

Clara: Described as ‘Miss La-De-Da,’ a woman who is in the prime of her life and knows it. She has a history with Barney, but is since uninterested.

Man: Clara’s date the evening of the play, interested in something other than dancing.

## Barney and Dell Side

gonna let 'em take ya back. (*Crone 2 takes a long swallow of the wine.*)

DELL. Barney, the only thing for you to do is go out on that farm. You'd like it there, Barney. Things'd be quiet there and you could relax. There wouldn't be nothin' t'upset ya.

BARNEY. There ain't nothin' gonna upset me. I don't need to relax. I'm all right, I tell ya.

DELL. Barney, you think you're all right, but you're really not. You're still sick, Barney. The doctors said you was to keep quiet for a long time and not try to do much. They say if you get out and start chasin' gals again and start gettin' mad and excited and worked up again, you'll end up in the zoo again, in the same ward.

BARNEY. I been a long time in that zoo, and now I gotta have me a woman.

DELL. Clara's no good for you, Barney. You know she ain't.

BARNEY. Clara loved me once, Dell.

DELL. You don't understand women like Clara, Barney. They love everybody once.

BARNEY. But Clara's gonna love me again.

DELL. How ya figure that?

BARNEY. 'Cause I got love streamin' outa my heart like heat from a furnace. And I can't let it go to waste. Someone has got to share it.

DELL. You're just buildin' yourself up to a big letdown, Barney. Lemme take you out to that farm, where it'd be peaceful and quiet.

BARNEY. (*With sudden ferocity.*) Mother Dell, I'm gonna call ya. You're worse'n a God damn woman with your advice and warnings and protections.

DELL. Now, Barney, take it easy. I'm not sayin' no more. It's just that I want you to be all right, Barney. You know that. It's just that I want ya to be all right.

BARNEY. (*Rising to full height.*) God damn ya, don't you know you can't make me all right, whatever's the matter with me? Don't you know that every man's gotta find his salvation somewhere inside hisself? And that regardless how sick I be, and how mixed up inside me, no amount of preachin', no amount of coaxin' and needlin' and cautionin' is gonna do any good unless I feel some change in here. (*He pounds his breast.*) That's where it's gotta come from.

DELL. I know, Barney.

BARNEY. And in here (*Indicating his heart.*) somethin' won't lemme rest, till I find Clara.

DELL. I'm sorry, Barney. I won't say no more.

BARNEY. All right, then. Let's sit peacefully and wait till she shows up.

DELL. All right, Barney. Anything you say. (*The two men sit, looking straight ahead, rather gloomily at the sea. Barney always wears an expression of trying to figure out some worrisome problem. Now a young girl, exceedingly pretty, comes on to meet the sailor.*)

GIRL. Have I kept you waiting long?

SAILOR. Not very, but it's seemed long.

GIRL. I got here as fast as I could. I had to lie to the folks to get out of the house. I told them I was going over to Helen's.

SAILOR. Gee . . . it's funny, isn't it?

GIRL. How d'ya mean?

SAILOR. I mean . . . when I came ashore this time, I didn't realize anything like this was gonna happen.

GIRL. I know what you mean.

SAILOR. 'Cause I never felt like this before . . . 'bout a girl. No fool!

GIRL. I never did either . . . about a boy.

SAILOR. Ernie and I left the boat together . . . he says have I got plans . . . I says no . . . so he tells me his girl Helen might be able to bring a friend . . . and I almost said, "Don't bother." Then I figured . . . why not? And I met you.

GIRL. And I almost didn't go when Helen called and asked me. 'Cause I met Ernie once before and didn't much like him. I just didn't s'pose he could have a friend . . . as nice as you.

SAILOR. Ernie's not a bad guy. Kinda loud but . . . (*On second thought.*) hey! You're the only girl ever told me I was nice.

GIRL. But you are.

SAILOR. No I ain't. Not really. It's just that . . . Well, when I'm with you, I feel nice . . . so then I'm nice. The rest of the time I'm pretty ornery . . . I think.

GIRL. No one's perfect.

SAILOR. No.

GIRL. Gee, I . . . I hate to go.

## Crones 1 and 2 Side

MATRON 1. What?

MATRON 2. Maybe we'd lose more weight if we trotted . . . part of the time. I remember when I was a Girl Scout, we used to go on hikes, and we'd trot for fifty steps, then walk for fifty. That way, you don't get tired.

MATRON 1. Shall we try?

MATRON 2. I'm game. *(Standing side by side, they start off together, trotting, as though beginning a long relay race. The crones watch them off, cackling hilariously, as though they had just observed the prize absurdity of all time.)*

CRONE 1. Oh, God, Sister, wouldn't it kill ya?

CRONE 2. *(Who is given to mocking imitations.)* "I have to go home now and fix something for the children. Junior needs all his strength 'cause he's layin' the new maid, and little Geraldine is always hungry when she gets back from the opium den."

CRONE 1. Oh, God, Sister, ain't they a riot?

CRONE 2. Every day that passes, I thank the stars that whatever I be now, I ain't one of them.

CRONE 1. If they wanta lose weight, why don't they quit eatin', like we do, and live on the bottle? That'd take off a few pounds.

CRONE 2. And make 'em merrier company, too, wouldn't it, Sister?

CRONE 1. Sure, sure. *(Now a young sailor comes on, a good-looking fellow in his late teens. Apparently he is expecting to meet someone, and his face looks concerned. He glances at his watch and then leans on the balustrade at the back, preparing himself to wait. The crones notice him and nudge each other.)*

CRONE 2. *(Apropos of the sailor.)* Is it time for the lovers? Are the lovers comin' out?

CRONE 1. It's always time for the lovers, Sister. Love goes around the clock.

CRONE 2. Waitin' for his sweet patootie, ain't he?

CRONE 1. Sure, sure.

CRONE 2. Handsome lad, ain't he? Or is he your type?

CRONE 1. *(Slapping her thighs and laughing.)* Any type's my type, Sister. *(They laugh uproariously together.)*

CRONE 2. Every once in a while, I get to feelin' kinda sry even now, and I think of puttin' a few feathers in my hair and jewels on my fingers and goin' off somewhere to dance. Oh, God, Sister,

remember the days we used to dance. *(She gets to her feet and swings around in a waltz with an imaginary partner.)*

CRONE 1. You can still do it, Sister. Graceful as a swan.

CRONE 2. *(Returning to the bench, winded.)* Now I can't, Sister. Can't dance no more. I'm winded and weak already. Gimme the bottle. *(She takes a long, satisfying swallow.)*

CRONE 1. Well, you useda could. That's the important thing. You useda could.

CRONE 2. *(Holding her heart painfully.)* Oh, God, Sister, that liked to did me in. I just ain't what I used t'be. That's all. *(Barney and Dell come on. Both are men of around forty. Barney is a large man, Dell rather small. Barney wears no hat or necktie, and his suit, of a light washable material, is clean but unpressed. His shoes are scuffed and the frayed collar of his shirt is open at the neck. Dell wears the working clothes of a laborer. He is a slight man with large sad eyes. They are talking as they come on together.)*

BARNEY. *(Angrily impatient.)* Don't talk to me no more about it, Dell. I'm tellin' you to shut up.

DELL. Barney, I'm only tryin' to persuade you to take the doctor's advice.

BARNEY. Doctors or no doctors, I'm stayin' here till I find Clara.  
DELL. Maybe Clara won't show up, Barney. It's been a long time and . . .

BARNEY. She'll be here. I know Clara.

DELL. *(Hopelessly.)* Oh, Barney. . . . *(When the two men sit together on a bench, crone 2 is quick to run to them with an outstretched hand.)*

CRONE 2. Help a poor widow woman, sirs. My house burned down last night and I got no money to take care of me and the kids. *(The men pay her no more attention than they do the breeze. She lingers for a moment. Something she detects in the men makes her suspicious and she runs back to crone 1.)* Oh, God, Sister, I didn't like the smell of them.

CRONE 1. What ya mean, Sister?

CRONE 2. I've smelled that smell before and I don't like it. It's that disinfectant they use in them loony bins. Before they let you out, they give you clothes that have soaked in it. Oh, God, Sister, it's a frightful smell to me. *(She is frightened.)*

CRONE 1. *(Passing the bottle.)* Console yourself, Sister. I ain't

## Man Side

BARNEY. I can't fight . . . a man in love. Dell, has got no fight. (Barney remains squatting on the ground, Dell hovering over him protectively. The crones cackle with an appreciation of irony. The sailor and the girl now come on from opposite sides of the stage, walking very slowly, tentatively toward each other. There is an occasional sob and whimper from Barney. Clara walks restlessly about the mall, looking occasionally into the distance for her date.)

SAILOR. (Walking very slowly toward the girl.) I . . . I just can't seem to go.

GIRL. (Coming slowly toward the sailor.) I can't either. (They meet now, at c., and grasp each other passionately, then melt in a sustained kiss.)

CRONE 1. (Transfixed by the scene of the sailor and his girl.) Oh, God, Sister, remember the days we had love?

CRONE 2. (With a wistful countenance of momentary pain.) Yes, Sister . . . I remember.

CLARA. (Apparently sees her friend in the distance.) It's about time. (She waits at R. It is dusk now and the sky is beginning to darken.)

SAILOR. (With the girl in his arms.) Maybe we could do something crazy . . . like gettin' married.

GIRL. Anything you say.

SAILOR. Just stay with me . . . as long as you can.

GIRL. I will.

SAILOR. What'll you do about your old man?

GIRL. I don't know.

SAILOR. Will he beat you?

GIRL. Prob'ly.

SAILOR. Cri-miney!

GIRL. It's all right. I don't care. (They sit together in a fast embrace. The two crones gaze on them as though they were figures in a dream.)

CRONE 1. You're cryin', Sister.

CRONE 2. Am I?

CRONE 1. I am, too. We gotta stop. (Barney still remains on the ground, nursing his wounds. Dell still is with him. Now Clara's boy friend comes on, a man close to forty, good-looking, sharply dressed. Clara becomes very seductive, a sly insinuation in her voice.)

### Start here

CLARA. Well . . . good evening!

MAN. Same to you.

CLARA. Are you the man who said you'd take me to the Palace Ballroom?

MAN. I'm the man.

CLARA. Well . . . I'm waitin'.

MAN. . . . Unless . . . you had some other place in mind, perhaps. Some place . . . more private.

CLARA. I do . . . but we'll have time for that later.

MAN. 'Cause when I look at you, Baby, I got other things on my mind than dancin'.

CLARA. (Laughing coarsely.) How many girls you said that to?

MAN. Hell, I don't know. But every time I say it, I mean it, Baby.

### End here

CLARA. C'mon, Daddy. Let's paint that ballroom red. (They strut off together arm in arm, the crones, of course, watching and cackling. It is night now. Barney staggers to his feet to watch them after they have disappeared. Then he calls out in a shattering voice.)

BARNEY. Whore! Bitch! That's all y'are, a two-bit whore! A two-timin' bitch!

DELL. Take it easy, Barney. There's cops around.

BARNEY. (Falling to the ground, pounding it with his fists, sobbing hysterically.) Oh, God! And sweet, sweet Jesus! Where is there someone who can take my love? Where is there someone who can bear it?

DELL. (Sympathetically.) I told ya that's what'd happen, Barney. (Barney bawls like a wounded stag, as Dell kneels by his side attentively. The two crones cackle from their perch in the background. The sailor and his girl sit on a bench in a fast embrace. The two matrons return, trotting together. They stop for a moment to get their wind, and take notice of the characters around them.)

MATRON 1. (Apprehensive.) Oh, goodness! Let's not stay here.

MATRON 2. No. This is no place for us. (They trot off together.)

CURTAIN

SAILOR. So do I. *(A pause.)* I got till midnight. Couldn't you stay with me till then?

GIRL. I just can't. I been out late the last three nights, and the folks are beginning to suspect something.

SAILOR. What the heck! You can do what you want to, can't you?

GIRL. I . . . I lied to you. I'm not twenty. I'm . . . seventeen.

SAILOR. Y'are? *(And as she nods.)* I'm nineteen. But I been on my own since I was a kid.

GIRL. I promised the folks I'd be right back. I don't want 'em to call Helen's and find out I'm not there.

SAILOR. Well . . . I guess this is it.

GIRL. I guess. Will you write?

SAILOR. I never have wrote letters . . . but I'll try.

GIRL. Just once in a while. Or just drop a post card that says love.

SAILOR. Okay.

GIRL. And . . . I'll remember you . . . as long as I live. I know.

SAILOR. *(With a feeling of futility.)* It just ain't fair. You go along your usual way, feelin' you're happy, takin' what comes, not carin' about too much one way or the other. . . . Then zowie! one day it happens. You fall in love. And it makes your whole life up until then seem kinda pointless. . . .

GIRL. That's the way I feel, too.

SAILOR. And then you can't just go back to your old life. 'Cause it don't seem no good.

GIRL. No. It don't.

SAILOR. *(Longingly.)* Can't you stay till my boat leaves?

GIRL. *(Frightened.)* I'll get an awful beating if I'm not back soon. My dad gets furious when I'm out late. I . . . I gotta go now. *(The sailor takes her in his arms and kisses her.)*

SAILOR. Goodbye!

GIRL. If you want me to, I'll not make any more dates till you come back.

SAILOR. I don't know . . . when I'll come back.

GIRL. *(Sobbing.)* I just can't bear to think I may never see you again.

SAILOR. Well . . . I'll probably be back in a year or so.

GIRL. A year! *(The girl runs off now, crying. The sailor stands a*

## Clara Side

*few moments looking after her, then walks off sadly, in the other direction. The crones have watched the entire scene. They cackle quietly.)*

DELL. *(To the crones.)* Can't you girls do anything but laugh?

CRONE 1. Might as well laugh as to cry, Mister.

CRONE 2. 'Cause if you ever get started crying, you'll never stop.

DELL. It don't sound very respectful. *(Crone 1 sees a familiar figure in the distance.)*

CRONE 1. *(Gloatingly.)* Here she comes, Miss La-De-Da!

CRONE 2. Dressed up in her Sunday best, out to find herself a lovin' man.

CRONE 1. She don't miss a night. That one! She can't go to sleep without her lovin' man. *(They both cackle gluttonously. Clara [Miss La-De-Da] comes strutting on, wearing a bright pink dress and shoes with high platform soles. Barney stands respectfully on seeing her approach.)*

DELL. Let her come to you, Barney. Take my advice. *(Barney remains silent and nervously alert. Clara's first preoccupation is with the crones.)*

Start here

CLARA. Why don't you old hags go off somewhere and die? *(The crones are invulnerable to any insult. They cackle.)* Why don't you old witches get on your brooms and ride off into the sky? *(The crones cackle louder.)* Old hags! Too old to have any fun yourselves. All you can do is sit here makin' fun of others. There oughta be a law against it. *(The crones continue to cackle.)* I'll never be like you. I'm still young. And I still got what it takes to make 'em take a second look. And I'm gonna have my fun. See? *(The crones cackle louder than ever. Angrily, Clara comes c. Barney now must speak out.)*

BARNEY. Clara!

CLARA. My God! Where'd you come from?

BARNEY. They let me go, Clara. First thing I do is come to see you.

CLARA. When did they let you go?

BARNEY. Just this morning.

End here

CLARA. You sure you didn't sneak out or break out?

BARNEY. Cross my heart, Clara, and hope to die.

DELL. He's on the level, Clara. The doctors told 'im he's okay. He still has to take it easy for a while, but he's okay.

CLARA. What're you doin' here?



## Matrons 1 and 2 Side

*cided to let life pass them by, and they would never admit to a feeling of loss.*

Start Here

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### THE MALL

*The scene is the mall of an amusement park in a sea-side resort town. The promenade stretches across the stage, benches at the back, the sea presumably being the audience. The time is early fall, late September or early October, and the park is out of season. Summer is past and there is a feeling of rejection in the atmosphere. Behind the mall, in the distance, one can see the vast, deserted structure of the Playland. A Ferris wheel, a roller coaster, a parachute ride loom up in the background, great and useless structures waiting for their season to return. Closer behind the promenade are the banners heralding the freaks, likenesses of whom are pictured on the banners in fading primary colors, in almost grotesque caricature.*

*On one of the benches at the back of the promenade, facing the audience, sit two old crones, wine-heads, sharing a bottle of cheap wine from which they take occasional refreshing swallows. During the warm weather, they make the mall their home, bringing their wine there, sometimes sleeping there if they can avoid detection by the police. It is hard to imagine they have another home, if they do, for they and their garments are as weathered as the benches and the scenery surrounding them, all of which they seem a living part. They sit here through most of the day, observing the life around them, nudging each other and cackling together in mutual appreciation of the ironies they look for. On another bench sit two middle-aged matrons who have lingered for a short rest before returning to their respective homes after one of their daily walks, which they make together in the mutual hope of reducing. They have just sat down and are fanning themselves and getting their wind. The crones watch, with hawk eyes, their every movement, as though they sought in the faces and actions of humanity reassuring proof of life's futility, for the crones have de-*

MATRON 1. Sort of a muggy day, isn't it?

MATRON 2. Yes. I don't like a muggy day, do you?

MATRON 1. No, I don't like muggy days at all. September's a sad month, don't you think? *(A pause.)* Or do you let yourself think about things like that?

MATRON 2. *(Musing.)* Now I don't know . . . if I've ever given the matter much thought. Let's see. Is September a sad month? Well, yes! Of course it is, isn't it? I mean, it's sad if you happen to like the summertime as much as Fred and I and the children do. Because in September, you know that summer's over and wintertime is ahead, and the weather will be cold. Yes . . . *(Looking around her.)* It's very sad.

MATRON 1. I think so. *(She's the type who is given to sudden changes of topic.)* Did you weigh yourself this morning?

MATRON 2. *(Nodding.)* I've lost two pounds.

MATRON 1. I wish I would.

MATRON 2. Oh, I'll probably put them right back on when I sit down to dinner tonight. I'm afraid the only way to lose weight is to go on a severe diet. I don't think these walks are doing either one of us any good.

MATRON 1. Well, I don't know about you, but I feel a hundred percent better.

MATRON 2. Oh, I feel better, too. It's so good for the circulation, but I don't think we're losing an ounce, either one of us. As a matter of fact, I think the walks are only making our flesh more solid. The only way to lose weight, I'm convinced now, is to go on a severe diet. Very severe.

End Here  
MATRON 1. *(Sadly.)* Oh, dear! *(Her spirits back.)* Well, we've sat long enough, don't you think?

MATRON 2. Yes I do. *(Looks at watch.)* Besides, it's time I was getting home and fixing something for dinner. *(Up from their bench now, they start to make their way across stage, down the promenade. They notice the crones, drinking and cackling, and assume a somewhat superior attitude.)*

MATRON 1. Goodness, the people one sees here after sunset.

MATRON 2. It really isn't safe. Do you think we might trot?

gonna let 'em take ya back. (*Crone 2 takes a long swallow of the wine.*)

DELL. Barney, the only thing for you to do is go out on that farm. You'd like it there, Barney. Things'd be quiet there and you could relax. There wouldn't be nothin' t'upset ya.

BARNEY. There ain't nothin' gonna upset me. I don't need to relax. I'm all right, I tell ya.

DELL. Barney, you think you're all right, but you're really not. You're still sick, Barney. The doctors said you was to keep quiet for a long time and not try to do much. They say if you get out and start chasin' gals again and start gettin' mad and excited and worked up again, you'll end up in the zoo again, in the same ward.

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DELL. Clara's no good for you, Barney. You know she ain't.

BARNEY. Clara loved me once, Dell.

DELL. You don't understand women like Clara, Barney. They love everybody once.

BARNEY. But Clara's gonna love me again.

DELL. How ya figure that?

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BARNEY. (*With sudden ferocity.*) Mother Dell, I'm gonna call ya. You're worse'n a God damn woman with your advice and warnings and protections.

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BARNEY. (*Rising to full height.*) God damn ya, don't you know you can't make me all right, whatever's the matter with me? Don't you know that every man's gotta find his salvation somewhere inside hisself? And that regardless how sick I be, and how mixed up inside me, no amount of preachin', no amount of coaxin' and needlin' and cautionin' is gonna do any good unless I feel some change in here. (*He pounds his breast.*) That's where it's gotta come from.

## Sailor and Girl Side

DELL. I know, Barney.

BARNEY. And in here (*Indicating his heart.*) somethin' won't lemme rest, till I find Clara.

DELL. I'm sorry, Barney. I won't say no more.

BARNEY. All right, then. Let's sit peacefully and wait till she shows up.

DELL. All right, Barney. Anything you say. (*The two men sit, looking straight ahead, rather gloomily at the sea. Barney always wears an expression of trying to figure out some worrisome problem. Now a young girl, exceedingly pretty, comes on to meet the sailor.*)

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SAILOR. Not very, but it's seemed long.

GIRL. I got here as fast as I could. I had to lie to the folks to get out of the house. I told them I was going over to Helen's.

SAILOR. Gee . . . it's funny, isn't it?

GIRL. How d'ya mean?

SAILOR. I mean . . . when I came ashore this time, I didn't realize anything like this was gonna happen.

GIRL. I know what you mean.

SAILOR. 'Cause I never felt like this before . . . 'bout a girl. No fool!

GIRL. I never did either . . . about a boy.

SAILOR. Ernie and I left the boat together . . . he says have I got plans . . . I says no . . . so he tells me his girl Helen might be able to bring a friend . . . and I almost said, "Don't bother." Then I figured . . . why not? And I met you.

GIRL. And I almost didn't go when Helen called and asked me. 'Cause I met Ernie once before and didn't much like him. I just didn't s'pose he could have a friend . . . as nice as you.

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SAILOR. Ernie's not a bad guy. Kinda loud but . . . (*On second thought.*) hey! You're the only girl ever told me I was nice.

GIRL. But you are.

SAILOR. No I ain't. Not really. It's just that . . . Well, when I'm with you, I feel nice . . . so then I'm nice. The rest of the time I'm pretty ornery . . . I think.

GIRL. No one's perfect.

SAILOR. No.

GIRL. Gee, I . . . I hate to go.