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Something I'll Tell You Tuesday

JOHN GUARE

The action of the play is the West 59th Street block between Eighth and Ninth avenues in New York City on a pleasant April day, first in a shabby brownstone walkup, then the corridor, the street, a lunch counter, and the street.

AGNES, *an old woman, sits packing a suitcase with nightgowns and a toothbrush and combs and brushes and curlers.*

ANDREW, *an old man, stands, back to her, staring out the window.*

AGNES (*the tail end of a fight*): If we left now, we could leave a note for them to meet us there.

ANDREW: They'll be here any minute.

AGNES: Andrew, it's only a block away—

ANDREW: It's a long block—

AGNES: It's such a nice day. Look at it outside. And I'll be flat on my back such a long time.

ANDREW: You'll only be there a couple of days. Doctor Daner said only a week maybe.

AGNES: Maybe, he said. I could be there a long time.

ANDREW: You won't be.

AGNES: Couldn't we walk? Oh, Andrew, I'll be flat on my back for God knows how long—

ANDREW (*turning to her*): Don't say that—

AGNES: And I can rest. That's all I'll be doing is resting and—I'd like to walk with you. (*He looks at her. He takes his necktie off the back of the chair and begins tying it.*)

ANDREW: Well, I can't blame you for not wanting to drive with Hildegarde and George.

AGNES (*stops packing*): Andrew?

ANDREW: Ah, it hurts me the way they fight. You all packed?

AGNES (*rises*): You know what I was thinking about this morning? Come here—look at this. Look behind the picture.

ANDREW: What is it?

AGNES: Look behind the picture. (*He crosses up to her, pantomimes moving a picture away from the wall.*) Remember that?

ANDREW (*puzzled*): What is it?

AGNES: That streak on the wall. Remember? (*She comes back down to her chair and resumes packing.*) The painters had just finished painting this room and the walls were still wet and we were fighting about something and I got mad at you and threw the grapefruit I was eating at you and you ducked and the grapefruit stuck to the wet wall and slid all the way down to the floor.

ANDREW (*pushing the picture back into place*): That was a long time ago.

AGNES: I got up very early this morning. You were still asleep and I roamed around the apartment and I remembered why we hung that picture on the wall. I haven't thought of that in years.

ANDREW (*sharply*): Are you all packed? (*He paces back and forth.*)

AGNES: I'm all ready. (*She hurries up packing and closes her bag.*)

ANDREW: I just wish this day were over.

AGNES: That's why I want to walk to the hospital. It'd be pleasant. We could leave a note for Hildegarde and George that we left already and they could meet us there. (HILDEGARDE *and* GEORGE *enter.* HILDEGARDE*'s hair is askew.* GEORGE *looks like he's on the brink of either murder or an ulcer.*)

GEORGE: Your mother's sick—for once in your life can't you think of somebody beside yourself—yatata yatata—

HILDEGARDE (*over the above*): Don't get me started—don't get me started— (AGNES *and* ANDREW *hear them. They look at each other.* ANDREW *goes to answer the door. She pulls him back.*)

AGNES (*whispering*): Andrew, don't answer the door. They'll think we've left and they'll go right to the hospital. We could take a cab if you're tired.

HILDEGARDE (*harshly*): Oh for God's sake—shut up, George. (*Calling sweetly.*) Mama? Papa? Open up! We're here! Knock knock knock! (*She straightens her clothes and glares at* GEORGE.)

AGNES (*pleading, whispering*): Andrew, we haven't taken a walk together in so long. That's what I was thinking about this morning. Please, Andrew? (*His shoulders slump. He motions her to the door.*)

HILDEGARDE (*panic-stricken*): You don't suppose anything's happened? Mama? Papa!

AGNES: Oh . . . (*Moving towards the door.*) We're here. Knock knock knock. Hello, Hildegarde. (*Pantomimes opening door.*) Hello, George. (HILDEGARDE *and* GEORGE *storm in.*)

ANDREW: Hello, Hildegarde. George.

HILDEGARDE (*quick kisses her parents*): Well, why didn't you open? (GEORGE *sits.*) I have been so nervous today I'll expect anything. We have had THE worst trip in—

GEORGE: Just shut up, Hildegarde. We got here safe and just shut up. (ANDREW *starts off to get the coats.* AGNES *goes to pick up her bag.* HILDEGARDE *sits.* GEORGE *turns away disgustedly.*)

HILDEGARDE: Do we have time? I have just got to sit down and rest and catch my breath. (*She starts crying.* AGNES *comes and puts her hand around* HILDEGARDE*'s shoulder.*)

GEORGE: For God's sake—it wasn't that bad.

HILDEGARDE (*furious*): Oh, it's all right for you to talk—

GEORGE (*brightly, to his in-laws*): Folks, we parked the car two blocks away. We were lucky. A DeSoto pulled out just as we came down the block, so anytime you're ready to leave, we'll go get it again.

HILDEGARDE: Just let me get my breath before we start out again.

GEORGE: We are just going down the block.

HILDEGARDE (*like it's the longest trip in the world*): And then all the way back to Newark. I'm driving this time, George. You are not safe behind a wheel. (*Turning to her mother.*) Mama, he knocked over every one of those yellow markers on the George Washington Bridge.

GEORGE: I did not knock over every one of them. With you screaming at me. Agnes, you have a nice voice. Andrew, you have a nice voice. I do not know where she gets her voice from. She screams and it does something to your ears. (*Leans back disgusted.*) Ah, for God's sake, Hildegarde, let's not wash dirty linen in public.

HILDEGARDE (*horrified*): This is not public. This is my home. This is the home I grew up in. (*She wraps her arms tightly around her mother's waist while she screams at* GEORGE.) He

has no consideration. Every one of the yellow markers. I always thought they were metal, (*appealing to her mother*) so when he knocked them all over, naturally, I screamed.

GEORGE (*all the hate in the world*): They were only rubber, Hildegarde. Yellow rubber.

AGNES (*brightly, trying to get out of* HILDEGARDE*'s grasp*): How are the children? (*She goes to her husband, rubbing her waist.*)

GEORGE (*glaring at* HILDEGARDE): Fine.

HILDEGARDE (*murderously at* GEORGE): We'll bring them over on Tuesday. It's a holiday in New Jersey.

ANDREW (*trying to break the tension*): What's the holiday?

HILDEGARDE: Some tree day. (*Breaking down.*) Oh, mother, I would like to—

GEORGE: Don't start that crying again. (*He throws his hands up at his in-laws.*)

HILDEGARDE (*pulling together all her dignity*): I would like to come to that hospital with you and just crawl in beside you and stay there. I'm so fed up. (*A whimper.*) So fed up.

GEORGE (*leaning forward to her*): I wish you would stay in that hospital. And let me tell you one more thing. I knocked over all those yellow markers on purpose.

HILDEGARDE (*daring him*): He's trying to drive me insane. Okay, George, drive me insane. If that's what's going to make you happy, you go right ahead and drive me insane. (GEORGE *stands up disgustedly.* HILDEGARDE *covers her head with her arms.*) Don't you dare hit me! (ANDREW *starts for her.* AGNES *pulls him back.*) Papa, help!

GEORGE (*amazed*): I'm only going to get a glass of water. (*He exits shaking his head.* AGNES *takes* GEORGE*'s seat.*)

HILDEGARDE (*whispering to her mother.* ANDREW *comes over behind* AGNES *quickly to hear what she's saying*): He called me the worst names once we got off that bridge. Names you wouldn't call the lowest scum on earth he called me. (AGNES *pats her hand.*)

GEORGE (*off*): What're you saying?

HILDEGARDE (*whispering*): He'd hit me. He has. He will.

GEORGE (*sticking his head out*): Anybody want a glass of water or coffee or something?

HILDEGARDE (*offhand*): I would like some water. Put sugar in it. (GEORGE *disappears back into the kitchen.* HILDEGARDE

pats her mother's hand with great dramatic concern.) Oh, Mama, how are you? You're going to be all right. I said to George that DeSoto pulling out just as we came down the block is a good sign. You're going to be all right.

AGNES (*nobly*): Don't be upset about me.

HILDEGARDE: Oh, it's not you, Mama. (AGNES *looks surprised.*) It's the kids. It's—it's him. It's everything. It's me. (*She starts laughing.*) Wow, aren't I the cheery one?

ANDREW (*touches her shoulder*): Now that's the Hildegarde I like to see. (GEORGE *reenters with the sugared "glass of water."*)

GEORGE (*good-naturedly, to her*): Minute I go out of the room she starts laughing.

HILDEGARDE (*still sore at him*): Now don't try and make up.

GEORGE (*giving her the "glass"*): Maybe I should stay out of the room more often. (*He winks at* ANDREW. HILDEGARDE *sips.*)

AGNES: How's your water?

HILDEGARDE (*startled at first*): What? Oh, this water. I thought you meant something else. This water—fine. Not as good as Jersey water—but still fine. (*Like a recipe.*) The sugar makes it sweet. (GEORGE *groans.*)

ANDREW: I think we should hurry. Hospitals run on a tight schedule.

HILDEGARDE: Oh, Papa, you're always in such a hurry. It's so nice here with you. (*Patting her mother's hand.*) My God, we won't always have this chance. (*Horrifying pause all around.* AGNES *goes to the window.*)

GEORGE: That's a rotten thing to say.

HILDEGARDE (*realizing what she's said*): Mama, I didn't mean that. I meant—and this is the truth— (*Rises, goes to* AGNES.) —the way George drives, I don't know how many more chances we're going to get.

GEORGE: Just leave my driving out of it. Look at your father. He's quiet. He's happy. Why don't you take after him?

ANDREW (*sitting*): I'm just thinking today, George. Just thinking.

HILDEGARDE (*laughing nervously*): Thinking? About how you're going to be a bachelor while Mama's away? Mama, do you think you can trust him? (AGNES *smiles.*) That Mrs. Hasselbach on the third floor's always had her eye on Papa.

Even when I was a little girl. (ANDREW *laughs at her. She goes to him, leans over from behind, and hugs him.*) It's the truth. I'd take the garbage down to the incinerator and Mrs. Hasselbach would stick her head out the door and she'd say, "Isn't your papa bringing the garbage to the incinerator today, dearie?"

AGNES (*playing along with* HILDEGARDE): I think I can trust him.

ANDREW (*pushing* HILDEGARDE*'s arms away*): Of course you can.

HILDEGARDE (*happily, sitting*): Papa, you're taking everything so seriously today. We're only teasing. Papa, Monica has her first date next Saturday. The High School Junior Prom. Isn't that nice? (GEORGE *comes behind* HILDEGARDE *and signals his in-laws not to get involved in this particular conversation.*)

ANDREW (*looking up at him, taking the cue*): What? Oh, maybe we better get started— (*He starts to rise.*)

AGNES (*reaching for her suitcase*): Yes, hospitals run on a—

HILDEGARDE (*turning to* GEORGE): What's he doing? Oh, he doesn't want to talk about Monica. (*She stands up to him. He goes to her. She faces him.* AGNES *and* ANDREW *sigh and both sit down, exhausted.*) You don't want to talk about Monica. He knows he did wrong.

GEORGE: I did not do wrong. Your father probably did the same thing for you.

HILDEGARDE: He never did.

ANDREW: What's the matter? What wouldn't I do?

AGNES: Who's her date?

GEORGE (*proudly*): Captain of the swimming team!

HILDEGARDE: Cocaptain of the swimming team. The way Monica talks about him you'd think he was Cary Grant or something. So George here goes out and buys her this fantastic evening gown.

GEORGE (*shuffling over by the window*): It's her first big date.

HILDEGARDE (*pacing*): It's cut down to here. She's only sixteen. She'll look like a freak. It wasn't even on sale. (AGNES *and* ANDREW *sit hypnotized—powerless—watching the fight between* HILDEGARDE *and* GEORGE *like a tennis match, their heads swinging right then left as* HILDEGARDE *and* GEORGE *shout back and forth.*)

GEORGE: So what? Your father probably did the same thing for you.

HILDEGARDE: Never! He never bought me a dress for more money than we could afford and my mother never had holes in her underwear. Mama, this sounds so crude to say—

GEORGE: Then don't say it!

HILDEGARDE: Here is Monica going to this dance. Only in the gymnasium. Wearing this fantastic evening gown that you can't even return. Now how can she have a good time knowing her mother is sitting up home waiting for her with holes in her underwear. Mama, all my lingerie is shot and here's Monica in this fantastic—cut down to here—it is just not fair!

GEORGE: Aha! (*Comes to her, mockingly.*) The truth comes out. You are a very jealous woman.

HILDEGARDE (*meeting him halfway*): I AM NOT JEALOUS! And it's time we got started. I'm going to get the car. You all wait right here. I'll be back in a few minutes.

GEORGE: I'm driving the car.

HILDEGARDE (*holding out her hand*): I will drive my parents to the hospital. You will give me the keys.

GEORGE (*a warning in his voice*): Hildegarde—

HILDEGARDE (*runs to her mother, hugging her, almost knocking her off the chair*): Mama, he punched me. We got off that George Washington Bridge and he leaned over and punched me right in the side. I'm frightened of him, Mama.

GEORGE: I'll be right back with the car. Be waiting out front. (GEORGE *pantomimes opening the door, storms out down the dark corridor.* HILDEGARDE *runs to the door and screams down the corridor.*)

HILDEGARDE: Don't you dare leave without me. (*She turns to her parents, smiling nervously.*) I better go after him. You can't trust him alone. (*She comes to her mother and kneels in front of her, speaking to her like you would to a child.*) This is what I wanted to tell you. I'll bring the bed jacket on Tuesday. I went to buy it, but the salesgirl told me on the sly they're having this fantastic sale on them—the nice lacy ones—on Tuesday. So I'll bring the bed jacket then. Okay? (*She stands up, smiling.*) We'll be right back. We'll beep. (*Patting her mother's hand.*) And, Mama, don't worry! (*She leans over*

and kisses her father.) Papa, she's going to be all right. (*She runs out the door down the corridor.*) George, if you step one foot in that car, I swear you'll be sorry. (*And she is off.* AGNES *and* ANDREW *look at each other. They take a deep breath.* ANDREW *checks his watch.*)

AGNES: Andrew?

ANDREW (*rubbing her knee*): They'll be back in a few minutes.

AGNES: It'll take them about fifteen minutes, won't it? To get back? Andrew, we could walk down the block in fifteen minutes. Please, Andrew, it'd be like a date. Andrew, I don't want to drive with Hildegarde and George.

ANDREW: Oh, I know what you mean there.

AGNES (*turning to him*): And I'm not tired. I slept so well last night and, Andrew, I'd just like to be alone with you. Please? Are you tired?

ANDREW: Are you packed? (*She nods yes. He pauses.*) Then get your coat on. (*He stands up.*) I'll leave a note. (*He pantomimes writing a note. She runs off and returns with his coat and hat and her coat and hat.*) I'll call a cab.

AGNES: No! I want to walk. (*She sticks her hat on. He takes his coat from her and puts it on. He reaches over and helps her with hers. She looks at him, surprised.*)

ANDREW: We better hurry. (*He picks up her suitcase. She buttons her coat.* ANDREW *stands at the door. She looks around the apartment.*) You'll be back next week . . .

AGNES (*with infinite sadness*): Yeah. Next week. (*She straightens the two chairs, putting them side by side, stands behind them, then goes out the door.* ANDREW *pantomimes closing the door. She blocks his hand.*) Wait, Andrew . . . (*She looks in the doorway through the apartment one more time, her eyes very wide. She crosses out into the dark corridor.*) All right. (ANDREW *closes and locks the door and sticks the note in the door. The light fades on the apartment. The corridor where they are is lit. A head sticks out from a door: an old deaf lady in a too large robe she keeps wrapped around herself.*)

MRS. HASSELBACH (*calling out*): You leaving now?

AGNES (*calling up to her*): Oh, hello, Mrs. Hasselbach. Yes, we're leaving now.

ANDREW (*tipping his hat embarrassedly*): Hello, Mrs. Hasselbach.

MRS. HASSELBACH: I saw your daughter and son-in-law were here a few minutes ago.

AGNES (*loud, but pleasant*): Yes. They came in from New Jersey.

MRS. HASSELBACH (*impressed*): Oh, they live in New Jersey now? Nice. I have relations in New Jersey. Where do your daughter and son-in-law live in New Jersey?

AGNES (*happily*): Well, nice seeing you, Mrs. Hasselbach. We better be going. All set, Andrew, Andrew? (*Loudly to her.*) Hospitals run on a tight schedule.

ANDREW: Nice seeing you, Mrs. Hasselbach.

MRS. HASSELBACH: I didn't notice any taxicabs waiting out front.

AGNES: We didn't call any taxicabs, Mrs. Hasselbach. We're walking.

MRS. HASSELBACH (*morbidly*): On a day like this you're walking?

AGNES: It's a lovely day.

ANDREW: Don't let her think I'm a cheapskate.

AGNES (*laughing*): And it's not because he's a cheapskate.

MRS. HASSELBACH (*offended*): So who said?

ANDREW: Ask her to tell Hildegarde and George we left.

AGNES (*kidding coquettishly*): Mrs. Hasselbach, Andrew has something to ask you.

MRS. HASSELBACH (*thrilled*): Oooooo—what is it?

ANDREW: Thanks a lot, Agnes. (*Loud.*) Mrs. Hasselbach, when Hildegarde and George come back, would you tell them we left already? We left a note.

MRS. HASSELBACH (*musically*): Certainly, Andrew. (*To* AGNES, *flat.*) I'll come visit you, dearie. Good luck. (*She exits.*)

ANDREW (*a deep breath*): Well, come on. Let's go . . . (*She opens the door and steps out into the street.*)

AGNES (*surprised*): It's such a lovely day . . . such a pretty day . . . (*She takes his arm, looking all around her. He is troubled.*)

ANDREW (*stopping*): Let me call a cab.

AGNES (*laughing*): Look at her at the window up there behind the curtain. OooHoo! Hello, Mrs. Hasselbach.

ANDREW (*pulling her along*): Now come on!

AGNES (*as they walk*): And the way she called you. Certainly, Andrew. You think I can trust you?

ANDREW: That's not funny.

AGNES: I'm only kidding. It's such a nice day.

ANDREW (*stopping again*): Look, we just can't walk up to the hospital. Let me call a cab.

AGNES: Are you tired?

ANDREW: No.

AGNES: Is the suitcase heavy?

ANDREW: No.

AGNES: Then we'll walk. (*They begin walking the outer edge of the stage area in a clockwise direction. Her arm is wrapped tightly in his. Her eyes shine proudly, taking in everything around her. He looks morosely ahead.*)

ANDREW (*muttering*): I don't want them thinking I'm a cheapskate.

AGNES: Who? The hospital? Mrs. Hasselbach?

ANDREW (*pulling her sharply back*): Watch out for that car— (*Follows the car till it's out of sight.*) Goddam drivers. (*They are at the curb. They step down in unison. They hurry across the street, looking both ways.*)

AGNES (*as they cross the street*): You were never what they call a John Jacob Astor, but you were never a Collyer Brother either. People know you're no cheapskate.

ANDREW: Watch the sidewalk. (*They are at the curb, they step up in unison.*)

AGNES: You know why I want to walk? When we moved here forty years ago, I said it'll be good. Kids ever get sick, you ever get sick, Roosevelt Hospital is only a block away. We can walk. So in forty years, nobody ever gets sick enough to have to go to the hospital, except me now. So let me get something out of living here forty years. Let me walk to the hospital. (*Stops, gasps.*) Look what those kids wrote on the sidewalk. I don't think I ever learned that word till I was—

ANDREW (*sounding almost harsh*): I don't think you ever learned that word. (*She looks at him, surprised for the second time today at him.*)

AGNES: That's— (*But they're at another crossing. He hurries her across the street to make the light. She stops him at the curb. They are both out of breath.*) That's very sweet.

ANDREW (*gruff*): Way they change these lights before you get a chance to get across— Watch the curb. (*They step up in unison. They walk in silence till* AGNES *smiles.*)

AGNES: Remember the old *Fred Allen Show* on the radio about the house blew up and the old man and woman go flying through the sky and she says, "This is the first time we been out together in twenty years."

ANDREW (*laughing in spite of himself*): Fred Allen was very funny.

AGNES: That's us. We haven't been out together like this in a very long while. This is like a date. I feel very young.

ANDREW: You are young.

AGNES: Listen, when your youngest daughter is having her change of life, you know you're not Shirley Temple anymore. (*Something catches her eye and she stops him.*) Andrew, could we have a cup of coffee?

ANDREW: We can't be late.

AGNES: You want to get rid of me?

ANDREW: NO! But—but hospitals run . . . let's get a cup of coffee. (*He sets down the suitcase. They sit on the chairs.* ANDREW *holds up two fingers. They sit in silence, looking straight ahead. A moment later, they pantomime picking up their cups and begin sipping.* ANDREW *murmurs an automatic thank-you to the counterman.*)

AGNES: I always liked Bickford's coffee.

ANDREW (*frowning*): Is Hildegarde having her change of—of life?

AGNES (*sipping*): Ah, she'll be all right.

ANDREW: I wish they didn't fight so much—her and George.

AGNES: You know what I'm gonna tell her Tuesday when she comes with the kids? I was thinking this while I was watching them. I'm gonna tell her she's lucky they still fight. That's the worst part of getting old, I decided. You don't miss the love part, the sex part, the not being able to have kids part. You think that's the part you're gonna miss, but you know it's gonna go. No, the one thing I always thought we'd have, you and me, is the fights. God, didn't we toss some beautiful battles. And the neighbors hammering on the walls. (*Almost angry.*) Not even a hot bath or a cup of tea can make you feel as clean as when I'd finish yelling at you and you'd finish yelling at me. That's the worst part of getting old, I decided. You just don't have the energy to fight. (*A long pause.*)

ANDREW: We better go . . .

AGNES (*looking straight ahead, lost*): Yeah . . . (*He throws two "dimes" on the counter. He stands up. He realizes he is old. He rises with great difficulty. She watches him, reaches for his hand, but needs both of her hands to lean forward on her knees to help herself rise. She takes his hand. He picks up the suitcase. They walk out very slowly. She stops him and looks at him. After a moment.*) God, Fred Allen was funny, wasn't he? (*They turn and walk out of sight.*)

END