

Lucille
A One-Act Play
By G. William Zorn

G. William Zorn
18 W. Carpenter Street, B-3
Athens, OH 45701
773.841.2327
gwzorn@yahoo.com

Characters

Lucille A woman with diabetes. 70s.

Candy A nurse. 20s-30s.

Judy The daughter-in-law.

LUCILLE
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(Lights up on a hospital room. LUCILLE is in bed. CANDY, a nurse, enters.)

CANDY

Hello. Mrs. Myers.

LUCILLE

If you've come for more blood, I'm all out. Empty. Caput. The tank is on E and I'm runnin' on fumes.

CANDY

Mrs. Myers?

LUCILLE

Who's askin'?

CANDY

I'm Candy, your transition nurse—

LUCILLE

Transition to what?

CANDY

Well, I hear you're going home tomorrow.

LUCILLE

News to me.

CANDY

Oh. Well, you're going home tomorrow. Ta-da!

LUCILLE

Dandy.

CANDY

(Louder.)

No, *Candy*.

(Looking through chart.)

Are you having trouble hearing?

LUCILLE

No, little girl, I was saying *Dandy*. As in, I'm looking forward to going home. 'Bout as much as I would look forward to each and ev'ry one of my fingernails being removed with a rusty pocketknife. See, hon, that's called sarcasm.

CANDY

Oh. I...uh...

LUCILLE

Isn't it amazing? All that in one little word? *Dandy*.

CANDY

That's right. You used to be an English teacher.

LUCILLE

Retired now, yes. How do you know—?

CANDY

Let's see.

(Reciting.)

A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings, and learn how by his own thought to derive benefit from his illnesses.

LUCILLE

Well now. That was one o' them Greeks. If I was the bettin' sort, I'd say Hippocrates.

CANDY

Very good.

LUCILLE

(Reciting.)

The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what you'd druther not.

CANDY

Mark Twain.

(Reciting.)

Medicine to produce health must examine disease; as music, to create harmony must investigate discord.

LUCILLE

Plutarch. Gimme a hard one at least.

(Reciting.)

Attention to health is life's greatest hindrance.

CANDY/LUCILLE

Plato.

(They laugh.)

CANDY

Say, am I going to have trouble with you, Lucille?

LUCILLE

Prob'ly. You want trouble?

CANDY

Honestly? Yes.

LUCILLE

Brave girl.

CANDY

If you've got something to fight *about*, you've got something to fight *for*.

LUCILLE

I don't know that one.

CANDY

Well, I haven't published it yet. Give me a couple years.

LUCILLE

(Smiling.)

This is gonna be fun.

CANDY

Now. Your doctor told me how important it is for you to get home in time for Thanksgiving.

LUCILLE

I never said that.

CANDY

Oh. It isn't true?

LUCILLE

Yes. I would like to be home for Thanksgiving, but I never *told* him that and he didn't ask me either.

CANDY

Well, I think your daughter-in-law talked with your doctor, actually.

LUCILLE

What was your name again?

CANDY

It's Candace, but everyone calls me *Candy*.

LUCILLE

Candy, I love my family.

CANDY

I am very happy to hear that. It is *so* import—

LUCILLE

Let me finish. I love my family, but I am not a child. I was born in the middle of the depression, number seven of fourteen kids. I've lived to see a half dozen wars. I was a riveter in dubya-dubya two. A damn good one, too. The Japs never sank one of my ships. I married my Alvin in forty-seven, ran a household, raised two boys, taught English to children who would rather read comic books and I've been president of the Elks Club Lady's Auxiliary twice. Does that sound like somebody you can run roughshod over?

CANDY

No—

LUCILLE

Does that sound like someone who doesn't deserve to be addressed directly?

CANDY

No—

LUCILLE

Does that sound like someone who can't take care of herself?

CANDY

No, ma'am.

LUCILLE

Does that sound like a woman with diabetes?

CANDY

Well, yes. To be honest. Anyone can—

LUCILLE

Oh, bull pucky. There is no diabetes in my family history.

CANDY

Well, Mrs. Myers, we're finding out more and more about this disease everyday—

LUCILLE

Then maybe they'll find out I don't actually have it.

CANDY

Mrs. Myers, normal blood sugar tops out at about 120. Do you know what your blood sugar was when you were admitted to the emergency room?

LUCILLE

They told me it was high.

CANDY

It was 982. You were essentially in pancreatic failure.

LUCILLE

But, I didn't feel that bad.

CANDY

Mrs. Myers, you couldn't see.

LUCILLE

Will you knock it off with that *Mrs. Myers* stuff!

CANDY

I didn't want to be presumptuous. May I call you Lucille?

LUCILLE

Well...your mama raised you right, didn't she? Yes. Please call me Lucille.

CANDY

Thank you. *Lucille* it is then. So, what has your doctor told you so far?

LUCILLE

Not a lick. He'd rather talk to someone nearer his own age, I guess. I've seen him for all of five minutes since I been here. Hell, my nosy daughter-in-law knows more than I do.

CANDY

I'm sure she only has your best interests in mind.

LUCILLE

Not much. That bony-butt, holier-than-thou wallet-chaser has one and only one purpose in life and that is to spend Alvey Junior's money. Not look after my care and feeding. I don't know what I did wrong by those boys o' mine, but all my sons married the snootiest women they could find. Think they're better than everybody else. Neither one of 'em got a lick o' common sense either. You can knock all day long but nobody ever answers the door, if ya know what I mean. Do you have children?

CANDY

Yes ma'am, I have a daughter.

LUCILLE

She the kinda girl that'd make fun of her poor, elderly mother-in-law?

CANDY

She's eight.

LUCILLE

Oh. Well, you make sure you raise her right, like your mama did by you, okay? If she don't particularly care for someone's cooking, there are ways to say it without hurtin' anybody's feelings. Not tasting the tiniest morsel of a person's green bean casserole only to suggest that Thanksgiving be catered next year and moved to her house.

CANDY

I take it you and your daughter-in-law don't get along?

LUCILLE

Did they teach you to state the obvious that way in nursing school? Didja figure that one out when I called her *bony-butt* or when I called her a bad housekeeper?

CANDY

I didn't hear you say she was a bad housekeeper.

LUCILLE

Well, I meant to.

CANDY

We can't choose who our children fall in love with, Lucille.

LUCILLE

Amen to that.

CANDY

Doesn't mean you have to love them, too.

LUCILLE

Well now, hold it right there, sister. I never said I didn't love her. She's family now. That's automatic love. She makes Alvey Junior happy, such as it is. Happiness and good taste, however, are two very different things. But I never said I didn't love the girl. Like her? Well, that's a horse of a different flavor. Why were we talkin' about this?

CANDY

Thanksgiving.

LUCILLE

Right. So, she told my doctor that it was important to *me* that I get out of here in time for Thanksgiving. Do I have that right?

CANDY

Seems that way, yes.

LUCILLE

Hmm...

CANDY

Ma'am?

LUCILLE

Well, I have to wonder. Judy's not the come-right-out-and-say-it type.

(Picks up her purse and takes out a photograph.)

That's her. Judy. Bony-butt. So, I have to wonder if she wants me to be there at Thanksgiving to show me how much better *her* Thanksgiving is or to shove all the food I can't eat anymore under my nose.

CANDY

She's that much of a fire-starter, huh?

LUCILLE

Trust that I am not exaggerating when I say that Gandhi woulda smacked that girl right upside the head. *Well, isn't that just the loveliest sheet, Mr. Gandhi. I had some bed sheets just like that... years ago. But, I'm sure you don't get many nice things in the desert.*

CANDY

Wow.

LUCILLE

Mm-hmm.

CANDY

Well, Lucille. I certainly can't tell you how to make your daughter-in-law a nicer person. What I can tell you is that you can eat whatever you want for Thanksgiving.

LUCILLE

I can?

CANDY

Yes, ma'am. You just can't eat as much as, I'm willing to bet, you normally would.

LUCILLE

Oh.

CANDY

That's actually a good place for us to start. I've brought along some literature for us to go over.

LUCILLE

Not much for reading these days, Candy. I like my papers. *The Star*. *The Enquirer*. And the daily paper, of course.

CANDY

Well, this will be something you'll need to read before every meal.

(Opening a small booklet.)

This is your carbohydrate counter. It lists the amount of carbohydrates in almost every food you can imagine. After a week or two, you'll practically have it memorized. Now, what would a typical breakfast for you be?

LUCILLE

Oh, I don't know.

CANDY

Well, let's start from the beginning. You get up in the morning...

LUCILLE

I get up. Get the paper off the porch. Oh. I usually have to pee first thing. You need to know that?

CANDY

Not necessarily, but go on.

LUCILLE

Well, then I get a cup of coffee. Alvey and I bought one of those Mr. Coffee's with a timer a few years ago, so it's ready when ya get up. And I sit and read the paper at the kitchen table.

CANDY

Good. Now, what do you usually have for breakfast?

LUCILLE

Well, I can't say that I'm always hungry first thing in the morning.

CANDY

It's going to be very important from now on that you eat three meals a day. If you can eat around the same time every day, that's even better. Do you think you can do that?

LUCILLE

Doll, I'm a widow living on a pension. I play bingo twice a week. I'm pretty sure I can fit it into my busy schedule.

CANDY

Excellent. Now, what do you like to eat for breakfast when you're hungry?

LUCILLE

Bacon and eggs.

CANDY

Toast?

LUCILLE

Sometimes.

CANDY

Very good. That's very good, Lucille. Alright, so let's say you have an egg, a strip of bacon and two slices of toast.

LUCILLE

And coffee.

CANDY

Yes, and coffee. Do you have sugar in your coffee?

LUCILLE

Lord, no. It dulls my orneriness.

CANDY

We wouldn't want to do that. So, black coffee.

LUCILLE

Yes.

CANDY

Alright, so now turn to the back of your carb counter and look up eggs.

LUCILLE

(Flipping through the booklet.)

Eggs. Page twelve.

(Flipping through the booklet.)

It says there aren't any carbs in eggs.

CANDY

That's right! You're doing very, very well, Lucille.

LUCILLE

What did I say about treating me like a child?

CANDY

Sorry. Now, there are other things in eggs like cholesterol and fat that you'll want to keep to a minimum.

LUCILLE

Well, I get my eggs from my brother Betty.

CANDY

You have a brother named Betty?

LUCILLE

I surely do. And a sister named Bob. Those are just nick-names, of course. My name's Batch to my brothers and sisters. They're all long stories that I have told folks before, but believe me, it's much more interesting if ya don't know the reasons behind them.

CANDY

Alright, I'll trust you on that.

LUCILLE

Brother Betty used to run a chicken farm. Retired now, too. So, he just has about ten layin' hens. Brings me over a dozen eggs a week I'd say.

CANDY

Good. So, we have an egg. No carbs there. How about the bacon?

LUCILLE

(Flipping through the booklet.)

Well, let me see here. *Bacon*. Page ten.

(Flipping through the booklet.)

Says bacon doesn't have any carbs either.

CANDY

That's right. Yay! Again, you have to watch out for cholesterol and fat with bacon.

LUCILLE

I usually get turkey bacon, if that helps.

CANDY

Well, you're just on your way to being my star student, aren't you?

LUCILLE

See, now you're doin' that on purpose.

CANDY

Little bit. But that cuts the amount of fat and cholesterol a lot. Now what else did we say? Toast.

LUCILLE

That'd be under bread, I'll assume.

(Flipping through booklet.)

One slice of bread has fifteen grams of carbs. So, if I have two slices that'd be thirty grams altogether.

CANDY

Yes. Excellent. You sure you weren't a math teacher?

LUCILLE

I'm about ready to smack you.

CANDY

(Laughing.)

Well, if it helps. I'll even turn the other cheek. Seriously, you're catching on very quickly. It takes some folks a lot longer, believe me. Okay, so—

LUCILLE

Let's just cut to the chase here. Forty-five grams for breakfast.

CANDY

Exactly.

LUCILLE

(Flipping.)

And if I have a BLT for lunch, that's thirty for the bread and nothing for the bacon. Right? Lettuce and tomato, five grams each. That's forty for lunch. Why do I have to keep track of these?

(CANDY takes out an insulin syringe.)

CANDY

Well, you need to know how much carb ratio insulin to give yourself.

LUCILLE

Uh-oh. The "I" word...

CANDY

(Setting down the syringe.)

We'll cross that bridge when we come to it, alright. You're doing great. Now, do you eat out a lot?

LUCILLE

Oh, every once in a while I get a hankerin' for a cheeseburger down to the Dairy Queen. No more than once a month or so.

CANDY

Alright. Now you'll find a listing for those in the back of your carb counter too, under *Combination Foods*.

LUCILLE

Let's see here.

(Flipping through booklet.)

Thirty grams of carbs and twelve grams of fat. Lord. That's a lot.

CANDY

Yes, but if you keep it to once a month, you'll do just fine. Now that's how you determine the amount of carb ratio insulin. Let's talk about how to measure your blood glucose level.

LUCILLE

Now my next door neighbor's a diabetic. I've seen her do that. She's got one of them little stabbers. Pokes a hole in your finger, right?

CANDY

Yes, ma'am.

LUCILLE

I believe I'm not gonna care much for this part.

CANDY

It is the most accurate way to determine your glucose level, or blood sugar. After a while, most patients don't even feel it anymore.

(Takes our lancet device.)

Now this is the lancet device.

LUCILLE

Stabber.

CANDY

Lancet device—

LUCILLE

Stabber.

CANDY

Now Lucille—

LUCILLE

Stabber. It's a stabber. Call it what it is. It stabs.

CANDY

Alright, then. If you want to get technical about it, this is just the stabber-holder. You have to insert the stabber into the end like this.

(Demonstrating.)

You'll get a prescription for all of these things from your doctor before you leave. But, we'll make sure to send you home with a little starter kit, too.

(Takes out lancet.)

Now, you insert the lancet—

LUCILLE

Needle.

CANDY

Into the lancet device—

LUCILLE

Stabber.

CANDY

You know what? We can't even do this now anyway. They just took your blood sugar before lunch, right?

LUCILLE

Yep. Stabbed my pinkie that time.

CANDY

Believe me, Lucille. After a while you won't even feel it.

LUCILLE

Oh, I didn't feel it. Sweetie, I sew. Needlepoint. Musta stuck my own finger a thousand times over the years. Occupational hazard. It's not the stabbin' I take issue with. I don't like the sight of my own blood.

CANDY

Oh. Well, there's really no way around that. What do you do when you stab your finger sewing?

LUCILLE

Well, I usually do my sewing on the couch in the front room. Alvey sittin' in the recliner. He'd see me turn a shade whiter than normal and he'd know right off. Kleenex at the ready, he'd grab hold of my finger and tell me a story. Usually about something we'd both been through. When we took the boys up to Wren's Lake or that trip to see the Grand Canyon. His eyes never leavin' mine till I completely forgot about—

(She begins to cry. Embarrassed.)

Oh, look at me.

CANDY

It's okay, Lucille.

LUCILLE

Blubberin' all over myself.

CANDY

You lost him recently?

LUCILLE

Yes, honey, I did. December.

CANDY

I'm so sorry.

LUCILLE

Oh, don't be. We had our time together. I have no regrets. Ain't nothin' to be sorry for. He was a good man and I miss him. And here I am, crying in front of someone I barely know. That's prob'ly how I got this. You cook for two for so many years, when you forget to hate to see it go to waste. It'd be admittin' somethin'.

CANDY

I bet he kept Judy in line, huh?

LUCILLE

Oh, good Lord, no. She scared the crap out of him. And after livin' with me that long, that's sayin' somethin'.

CANDY

You know, Lucille. I can't help but think that the biggest obstacle to your recovery might be your family.

LUCILLE

Continue.

CANDY

Well, we see a lot of patients become lax in their efforts to keep up with their blood sugar readings or they might start to forget their insulin. But, those that have support from their families always do much better. Someone to ask if you've taken your insulin today or to encourage you to eat better.

LUCILLE

Well, I rarely see the boys. Alvey Junior drives truck cross-country and Davey's manager down at the Super 8.

CANDY

And your brothers and sisters?

LUCILLE

Well, I see Betty once a week when he drops off the eggs. Sister Bob lives over ta Greenville. I see her every couple months. The rest of us are all scattered. I have a brother in Denver and one in Springfield. We have a reunion about once every couple years, but that don't help you none, now does it.

CANDY

So, who do you see most often? Family-wise.

LUCILLE

(A beat.)

Bony-butt.

CANDY

Oh.

LUCILLE

Every Tuesday, like clockwork she stops by and we go do the grocery shopping.

CANDY

Hmm...

LUCILLE

What?

CANDY

Do you enjoy that time with her?

LUCILLE

Well, I gotta shop. She's gotta shop. All God's chil'en gotta shop. It's more convenient to go together, that's all.

CANDY

I see.

LUCILLE

She spends too much time in the hair color aisle, though, if you want my honest opinion.

CANDY

I wonder if you'll let me try something, Lucille.

LUCILLE

I tell her, honey, they don't have a gallon-size.

CANDY

I would like to try a little role-playing.

LUCILLE

(Suspicious.)

Okay.

CANDY

I would pretend to be you and you can pretend to be Bony—
I mean, Judy.

LUCILLE

And what would the point of that be?

CANDY

I think it might help me to see how difficult your transition will be.

LUCILLE

Okay...

CANDY

And it might help you test the waters a bit. See if she'll be more
help or hinderance.

LUCILLE

Oh, she'll be alright, I think. She's just stuck-up 'sall.

CANDY

Well, let's find out. Now, it's Tuesday morning and your doorbell
rings.

LUCILLE

Don't have a doorbell.

CANDY

Then there's a knock at the door.

LUCILLE

She's never knocked on a door a day in her life. Usually she just—

CANDY
(As LUCILLE.)

Come in!

LUCILLE
(As JUDY.)

Morning, mother Myers. Sorry I'm late.

(As LUCILLE.)

She's always late.

CANDY

I thought you said *like clockwork*.

LUCILLE

Yeah. If she says she's comin' over at ten, she'll be there at ten fifteen. If she says ten thirty, she'll be there at ten til eleven. Like clockwork.

CANDY

Oh.

(As LUCILLE.)

Well, hello there, Judy.

LUCILLE

What the hell was that?

CANDY

What?

LUCILLE

Ya make me sound like a car salesman.

CANDY

(Doing a crankier LUCILLE.)

Hello, Judy.

LUCILLE
(As JUDY.)

Oh good. You've got coffee on. I just didn't have the time before I left. Rush rush rush. That's all I do these days. My nails. My hair. I simply must spend your son's money before he gets smart and divorces me. Are you outta sugar? Oh that's right. I'm sorry. Well, Equal will just have to do, I guess. How are you feeling?

CANDY

I'm feeling fine, Judy. Just fine.

LUCILLE

I'm glad. You know you gave us quite a scare the other night. How you could have let yourself get that sick I'll never know, bless yer heart. At death's door—

CANDY

I wasn't at—

LUCILLE

And you arguing with that poor nurse in the emergency room.

CANDY

I told her my veins roll—

LUCILLE

She was only trying to help you.

CANDY

Well, she wasn't—

LUCILLE

Honestly, you just have to be a little nicer to people and they'll do whatever you want them to. I should know. But, you scared us half to death, bless yer heart. I came this close to singin' it.

CANDY

(As CANDY.)

Singing what?

LUCILLE

Your song, of course. You know. Kenny Rogers. Yer favorite. I told you I'd be singing it at your funeral.

(Singing.)

Ya picked a fine time to leave me, Lucille.

CANDY

(As CANDY.)

Oh, Lucille, that's awful.

LUCILLE

Four hungry children and a crop in the field.

CANDY

She wouldn't really do that, would she?

LUCILLE

I've had some bad times. Lived through some sad times. But this time your hurtin' won't heal.

CANDY/LUCILLE

Ya picked a fine time to leave me, Lucille.

(They are laughing.)

CANDY

Oh, that's horrible.

LUCILLE

This is fun. I used to do this with my students. I must've heard *Romeo and Juliet* a thousand times. I still know all the speeches. Comes out at the oddest times, even now.

(LUCILLE picks up the insulin syringe.)

LUCILLE

(Reciting.)

I sell thee poison; thou hast sold me none. Farewell. Buy food and get thyself in flesh.

CANDY

(Reciting.)

Come, Cordial and not poison, go with me to Juliet's grave; for there I must use thee. I know what you're doing, Lucille. That is not poison and this is not the end of your life.

LUCILLE

Maybe not. But it's the beginning of the end, isn't it? I was about five, I think, when my grandmother called me into the kitchen to teach me how to make her stuffing. This was important. This was the equivalent to a state secret. The entire county clamored to get their hands on that recipe. Including my mother. And here I was, my precocious, little five-year-old self, learning about soaking the celery in bacon grease overnight and using biscuits instead of croutons and never letting a utensil get anywhere near that stuffing. *Your hands*, she said. *Your lovin' hands are what make people*

envious. People think there's some mysterious ingredient, and there is, but not what they think. No herb or spice or temperature can replace your own hands, baby girl. That's where the love comes from. But Candy, I ain't makin' Thanksgiving this year. It's bein' brought in by people I don't even know. In big foil pans kept warm with Sterno. Touched by plastic and metal. And strangers' hands. Where's the love in that? It's the beginning of the end.

CANDY

Maybe it's time to pass it along.

LUCILLE

What?

CANDY

Your grandmother's stuffing. Maybe Miss Bony-Butt never had that kind of relationship. She doesn't know that a caterer can never live up to her mother-in-law.

LUCILLE

And maybe Sean Connery will ask me to marry him.

CANDY

I can't imagine that someone who has as much fight, as much pure, unfiltered, unfettered orneriness would – *could* – ever go *gently into that good night*. You've taken everything I've thrown at you today and sent it back to me twice as fast. I'll bet you match ol' Bony-Butt toe to toe, too. You don't love that girl because you have to. You love her because she's a good sparring partner. But, she can't read your mind. Sparring is good. Keeps your mind sharp, but talk to her. Have a real conversation and see where that takes you.

LUCILLE

Well, not to toot my own horn, but I can give as good as I get.

CANDY

I'll bet you do. And something tells me as long as you can hold your own against somebody like that, you're gonna be just fine, Lucille.

LUCILLE

I tried to tell you that when you first got here. Now, don't you have some sick people you need to see? I can't be the only one in this place...with diabetes.

CANDY

Yep. You're gonna be just fine, alright. I'll be back before your dinner arrives to show you how to check your own glucose and we'll take care of your insulin then.

LUCILLE

Stab away.

CANDY

You tell the day nurse to come get me if ya need anything, alright?

LUCILLE

I got a bed, my needlepoint and a TV Guide crossword just beggin' to be put outta its misery. What else do I need?

CANDY

Alright then. You remember my name, right?

LUCILLE

Honey, I am a diabetic and your name is Candy. What do you think?

CANDY

Irony.

LUCILLE

There's hope for you yet.

(CANDY exits. LUCILLE puts on her reading glasses and picks up the needlepoint. After a moment, she stops and picks up the insulin syringe.)

LUCILLE

There are worse things, I suppose.

(From down the hall we hear a voice.)

JUDY

(Off.)

Yoo-hoo, mother Myers! Where they hidin' you, honey? *Ya picked a fine time to leave me, Lucille.*

Lord, gimme strength.

LUCILLE

END OF PLAY.