

LITTLE LIVES, OR, ROUNDED BY A SLEEP

Characters

Claudia Horace	A wealthy matron, early 70's
Vera Cooper	A hairdresser, late 30's
Freddy Cooper	Vera's son, a student and a doctor, ages 17 and 32
Martin Hogan	A doctor, mid 40's and 60ish
The Warden	A Warden, middle aged

The play is set in a small town in the midlands of England in the mid '70's and in the late 80's.

Act 1 takes place in Vera's living room

Act 2 takes place in Vera's living room, a doctor's consultation room, and a jail cell.

Notes

One actor can play Mrs. Horace and The Warden.

Frank Sinatra's songs figure prominently throughout the script. *Sister Morphine* (Rolling Stones) might be of use between Act 1 and Act 2.

Act I Scene 1. Late 1980's

Downstage L is lit. MRS. HORACE, a well-coifed older woman, immaculately dressed, sits in an elegant chair next to which stand an elegant end table. Dr. Freddy, early 30's sits across from her in a straight back chair. His doctor's bag is on the floor beside him.

MRS. HORACE

I am quite certain.

DR. FREDDY

You've thought about the family...

MRS. HORACE

Yes.

DR. FREDDY

It's hard on the children. You know when it's unexpected.

MRS. HORACE

It is precisely what they expect.

DR. FREDDY

Eventually, yes. Surely not now.

MRS. HORACE

I have never liked a great deal of bother. I've conveyed that to the children. Cancer makes a good deal of bother.

DR. FREDDY

You've got time yet, Mrs. Horace. Surely you and they want to have time to prepare.

MRS. HORACE

(dismissive) Thank you, Doctor.

DR. FREDDY

It mustn't be about anyone but you.

MRS. HORACE

(suspicious) Has anyone put you up to this?

DR. FREDDY

No! But if it's pain that's the worry, we can keep that in check.

MRS. HORACE

If it were pain relief I was after I'd check into a pain clinic. It's a quick finish I want. Which I had understood, based on our earlier conversations, you are amenable to.

DR. FREDDY

I have been willing to assist nature in her course, of course but...

MRS. HORACE

And you did agree to assist nature in her course on my behalf, did you not?

DR. FREDDY

That was a hypothetical conversation, Mrs. Horace. One which I thought we would return to should the circumstances of your illness dictate. You're still rather sturdy.

MRS. HORACE

Surely it is my prerogative to depart in whatever condition I see fit. That as why I switched my care to you. You'll see also that I have gone to some lengths to make it worth your while. Here.

MRS. HORACE places an envelope in FREDDY's hand.

DR. FREDDY

What is this?

MRS. HORACE

A codicil to my will in which I have recognized you as someone who has been a comfort to me during my decline and whom I wish to repay with generosity.

DR. FREDDY

I'm pleased to be of use, Mrs. Horace. But this is not why I help people in the way I do.

MRS. HORACE

Why you do what you do is no interest of mine. I understand you to perform an important community service that I can only assume is inadequately recognized by the NHS.

DR. FREDDY

Your faith means a great deal to me. It is a bit of a lonely path I walk.

MRS. HORACE

Read it.

DR. FREDDY

Shall I? Now?

FREDDY reads.

DR. FREDDY (cont'd)

This is too much, Mrs. Horace. I'm a professional man. I am not motivated by money.

MRS. HORACE

I'm sure you'll find a use for it. In any event it's in the hands of my solicitor now.

DR. FREDDY

Well. I suppose I could use it to help others whose lives have been less fortunate than our own.

MRS. HORACE

Let's move along, shall we?

DR. FREDDY

Are you really and truly certain?

MRS. HORACE

I am.

DR. FREDDY

Okay.

FREDDY brings a syringe and a medicine bottle out of his bag.

MRS. HORACE (cont'd)

Morphine, is it?

DR. FREDDY

Potassium chloride. Highly effective.

MRS. HORACE

I have understood potassium to give an unpleasant burn.

DR. FREDDY

It's not supposed to be that bad.

MRS. HORACE

Don't you know?

DR. FREDDY

I'm a pill man, actually. Your request is unusual. I know you are wanting it to be fast/so

MRS. HORACE.

I want speed and I want morphine. I want a pleasant exit.

DR. FREDDY.

Morphine would create a certain awkwardness.

MRS. HORACE

That isn't my problem.

DR. FREDDY

If there should be an investigation of how your....exit... And if they found narcotics, for example in your blood. Well that could raise questions, you see. Where did you get them, etc. Was it suicide. Best to avoid all that.

MRS. HORACE

You are committed to making your patients comfortable?

DR. FREDDY

Always.

MRS. HORACE

That is your reputation.

DR. FREDDY

Of which I am proud.

MRS. HORACE

And you are competent at what you do, are you not?

DR. FREDDY

(a tad indignant) I am.

MRS. HORACE

Then you should be able to muddle through this in an efficient manner that preserves my good name, and casts no doubt upon yours. Is that right, Dr. Cooper?

DR. FREDDY

Well, yes. Probably.... I expect so.

MRS. HORACE

Let's get this over with then.

All right.

DR. FREDDY

FREDDY replaces the vial he has in hand, and takes another from his bag. He draws fluid into a larger syringe and places it on the table. He reaches into his bag again and pulls out a mirror. As he does so, VERA, with bright red hair, and dressed in a merry widow's corset, covered by an open raincoat flits across the stage. FREDDY alone sees her. He is frightened.

Is there someone here?

DR. FREDDY (cont'd)

No.

MRS. HORACE

I saw....some...thing

DR. FREDDY

He blinks furiously.

We are quite alone.

MRS. HORACE

A member of your household?

DR. FREDDY

Maid and cook have both gone to their families.

MRS. HORACE

Perhaps they changed their minds?

DR. FREDDY

A taxi came round to take them to the 5 o'clock train.

MRS. HORACE

(hesitant) You're sure?

DR. FREDDY

NO MORE.

MRS. HORACE

FREDDY looks around and seeing no one, continues.

DR. FREDDY

You're best bet is to go directly into the jugular vein. You see? It's the rather prominent vessel just here.

FREDDY holds the mirror in front of her neck and dabs the alcohol swab along her vein.

DR. FREDDY (cont'd)

When you're ready, you will want to angle the needle so it's pointing to your heart, like this.

FREDDY demonstrates the positioning of the needle on his own neck.

MRS. HORACE

Excuse me? *I* place the/ needle

DR. FREDDY (cont'd)

And then dab off with the alcohol pad...

FREDDY reaches into his bag and takes out an alcohol swipe and begins to remove it from its package.

MRS. HORACE

I dab off?

DR. FREDDY

To avoid infection.

MRS. HORACE

(incredulous) Now look here. I do not intend to angle this or any other needle, NOR am I concerned about infection.

DR. FREDDY

I can't place the needle with my own hand, Mrs. Horace. You must understand that I'm not able to put myself in the position of being the one who does the actual...ending.

MRS. HORACE

What exactly is the nature of the service you provide? Give people a few pills every now and again?

DR. FREDDY

(recovering his dignity) That is correct.

MRS. HORACE

And when someone doesn't have it in them to take pills?

DR. FREDDY

I haven't been faced with that before. The means I have provided have heretofore been entirely acceptable. This is a delicate situation for me. Ethically, I haven't put/myself in the

MRS. HORACE

Now you listen up Dr. Cooper. I cannot take my own life. The church is very strict about that sort of thing. I intend to be buried at St. Stephens where generations of my family lie.

DR. FREDDY

I'll stay with you and dispose of the needle. No one will know you did it. I assure you that your mode of exit will remain a secret safe with me.

MRS. HORACE

I have no intention of doing this. What if blood were to spurt all over the place. How do you think that would look?

DR. FREDDY

All right. All right. I'll place the needle. But you'll have to do the injecting yourself.

MRS. HORACE

This is hardly professionalism. You're the doctor. It is to you to administer the morphine.

DR. FREDDY

What if I squeeze your hand as your hand holds the needle?

VERA walks across the stage shaking her head in disapproval. She is not in FREDDY's line of vision.

MRS. HORACE

See that you do it.

DR. FREDDY

Okay. Ready, steady....Are you...ready?

MRS. HORACE

(exasperated) Yes.

DR. FREDDY

Would you like to take a minute to pray?

MRS. HORACE

No thank you.

FREDDY puts on surgical gloves. He removes an alcohol swab from its package and begins to clean her neck. MRS. HORACE reaches at it and flings it to the ground.

MRS. HORACE (cont'd)

For the love of god, get on with it.

FREDDY positions the needle by MRS. HORACE's neck. VERA enters again, glaring. FREDDY trembles.

DR. FREDDY

Look, where it comes again!

MRS. HORACE

What is the matter with you?

VERA creeps to the side of the stage.

DR. FREDDY

Someone's here.

MRS. HORACE

And who would that be?

DR. FREDDY

Someone long dead. Can you not see her?

MRS. HORACE looks around.

MRS. HORACE

I do not.

DR. FREDDY

Surely....her hair, still so beautiful....Mother....Can you not see her?

MRS. HORACE

That is correct. I cannot.

DR. FREDDY

It harrows me.

MRS. HORACE

What?

DR. FREDDY

It harrows me.

MRS. HORACE

You are eroding my confidence at a time that is of great moment to me. It is deeply dispiriting.

VERA stands in front of FREDDY, her eyes averted.

DR. FREDDY

Look, it is offended.

VERA exits.

DR. FREDDY (cont'd)

Stay, illusion! Speak to it, Mrs. Horace. Call it back.

FREDDY trails off following VERA.

DR. FREDDY (cont'd)

Come back.

MRS. HORACE

Focus! Do the work you've come here to do.

FREDDY continues his search for VERA

MRS. HORACE

If you do not attend to me instantly, I will personally report you to the General Medical Council for premeditated murder.

FREDDY looks at her, confused.

DR. FREDDY

What?

MRS. HORACE

And it will not go well for you when I show them the codicil and tell them my story.

DR. FREDDY

I don't understand.

MRS. HORACE

I demand that you complete our business.

FREDDY remains distracted by his search.

DR. FREDDY

Yes. Yes.

MRS. HORACE

I cannot be more serious about this.

DR. FREDDY

All right. All right.

MRS. HORACE

Do it. Now. Now!!!!

FREDDY grabs MRS. HORACE'S hand as he positions the needle and plunges some of its contents into her neck. VERA stands directly over him, glowering. MRS. HORACE goes limp. FREDDY, trembling, removes the needle.

DR. FREDDY

What have I done?

He looks around but VERA has vanished in a huff. He replaces the needle in his bag, peels off his surgical gloves and places them in his bag and exits.

End Scene i