

Lotions and Potions

by Jo Morello

An Award-Winning Intergenerational One-Act Play
for Young Adults and Family Audiences

WINNER, DISCOVERY '90, Choate Rosemary Hall

National Competition: New Plays for High-School Audiences
Wallingford, CT

**FINALIST, ANNA ZORNIO MEMORIAL
CHILDREN'S THEATER PLAYWRITING AWARD, 1990**

University of New Hampshire Department of Theater and Dance
Durham, NH

FINALIST, SHUBERT FENDRICH MEMORIAL PLAYWRITING CONTEST, 1991

Pioneer Drama Service: National Competition to Discover New Plays
Denver, CO

WINNER, 1991-92 INDIVIDUAL ARTIST FELLOWSHIP

Florida Arts Council: Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs
Tallahassee, FL

WINNER, FIRST YOUNG PEOPLE'S DRAMA PROJECT, 1992

Eugene O'Neill Theater Center: Creative Arts in Education
National Competition: New Dramatic Literature for Children and Teenagers
Waterford, CT

SECOND-PLACE WINNER, DEEP SOUTH NEW PLAYWRIGHTS' CONTEST, 1992

Springer Opera House, Columbus, GA

FINALIST, FAMILY ONE-ACT PLAY COMPETITION, 1992

Theatre With a Message, Nashville, TN

SELECTION, NORTH CAROLINA PLAYWRIGHTS' FESTIVAL, 1992

North Carolina Playwrights' Center, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

**FINALIST, ANNUAL ONE-ACT PLAYWRITING COMPETITION
OF THE LITTLE THEATRE OF ALEXANDRIA, 1992**

Alexandria, VA

**SECOND-PLACE WINNER, BEVERLY HILLS THEATRE GUILD
PLAYWRIGHT'S AWARD FOR CHILDREN'S THEATRE, 1999**

Beverly Hills, CA

**SELECTION, "THE PLAY'S THE THING" READING SERIES
THE PLAYERS, 2001, Sarasota, FL**

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Lotions and Potions

Four females, two males; unit set; runs 45-50 min.; can tour

Synopsis

Three high-school students volunteer for the "More Than Skin Deep" program, providing make-up and grooming for patients in a hospice. A special friendship develops between Jennifer, a shy 16-year-old tagalong, and the very wise Mrs. Ryan, 90. The elderly woman helps Jennifer develop self-confidence--with a little help from her medium and a magic potion.

Cast of Characters

Jennifer.....16. Brainy tomboy. Longs to be pretty and popular but doesn't know how. Everybody's kid sister. Doesn't use make-up. Wears sloppy clothing; baseball cap(?); unkempt hair.

Meg.....17. Pretty, popular, self-confident but self-centered. Perfectly groomed "Queen-of-the-Prom" type. Jennifer's idol.

Bob.....17. Smart, quiet. Not the most handsome boy in the class but one of the nicest. Slavishly devoted to Meg.

Anne.....33 or so. Cosmetologist. Street-smart, savvy, compassionate. Firm but also amused in her dealings with students. Sophisticated; favors latest styles in make-up and dress.

Mrs. Ryan....90. Very sick but sprightly and lively. A faded beauty who needs help with her grooming and make-up.

Mr. Ryan.....93. Frail. Devoted to "Mommy" (Mrs. Ryan) and always striving to meet her needs, but unable to care for her in her final illness.

LOTIONS AND POTIONS was originally developed at Choate Rosemary Hall, Wallingford, CT, with script-in-hand readings at the Paul Mellon Arts Center on July 28 and 31, 1990. Director: Ron Emmons; Dramaturg: Terrence Ortwein.

LOTIONS AND POTIONS was further developed at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Waterford, CT, with a script-in-hand reading at New London High School on March 6, 1992. Directors: Pam Stover and Tom Deedy; Producer: Maggie Hardy.

Lotions and Potions

Set Requirements

Time: The 1990s

Place: Mrs. Ryan's room in a hospice and an adjoining hallway area

Set: Mrs. Ryan's room is a cheery patient's room with a wheelchair, wall-hung box resembling the back of a TV camera, chair, and night stand. A doorway connects her room with a hallway area. (Hallway scenes can be played before the curtain.)

Mrs. Ryan's wheelchair faces the audience and her TV, which points upstage. The TV is seen only from the back and need not be functional. It may be rigged to display a bluish glow when it is "turned on."

Special props

- Wheelchair (or reasonable facsimile).
- Large make-up case with a mirror, hair spray, hair ornaments, various cosmetics.
- Small camera with flash.
- Small bottle to contain magic potion.
- Two "photos."
- Pencil, paper, notebook.
- White cane as used by the blind.

Costume Descriptions

Jennifer: Tom-boyish clothes: torn jeans, baseball cap, unkempt hair. Clean but not necessarily neat or "with-it." Later, a neatly pulled-together outfit with sweater or blouse and skirt or slacks.

Meg: "Girly"-type garb for a "queen-of-the-prom" sort of high-school girl. Neat, fussy, feminine.

Bob: Typical garb of a high-school boy in the 1990s. Neat, clean.

Anne: A stylish but no-nonsense outfit, as befits a fashion counselor working with H.S. students. Could be skirt, slacks or suit.

Mrs. Ryan: Bathrobe.

Mr. Ryan: Neat, somewhat old-fashioned clothes such as an elderly gentleman would wear in the 1990s: trousers, shirt, casual cardigan over it. Since he is blind, colors need not match.

SCENE 1

MRS. RYAN'S ROOM (A PATIENT'S ROOM) AND
THE HALLWAY OUTSIDE, IN A HOSPICE.

A Thursday early in the school year, just after school.

Mrs. Ryan's cheery room has a wheelchair, TV, chair, night stand. A doorway connects her room with a hallway area. (Hallway scenes can be played before the curtain.) MRS. RYAN is seated in her chair, facing the audience and her TV, which points upstage. She may be dozing. During the opening conversation in the hallway among STUDENTS, she remains frozen, barely seen under a pale blue light on her and the TV.

LIGHTS UP on the hallway, where MEG, BOB and JENNIFER wait impatiently, not wanting to be there. Bob and Meg act as a couple. Jennifer, apart from them, paces.

BOB

Doesn't look like a hospice to me. Where's all the bicycles?

MEG

Bicycles?

BOB

Where's the other kids?

JENNIFER

(Quietly) I'm here.

Meg and Bob ignore Jennifer. She's hurt.

MEG

(To Bob) What bicycles, Bob? What kids?

BOB

Isn't this a youth hospice?

MEG

You mean a youth hostel?

BOB

Hospice. . . hostel. . . . What's the difference?

MEG

If you had been at Miss Woodson's meeting last week--

JENNIFER

(approaching them tentatively)

They used to be the same. . . I looked it up. . . In medieval times--

BOB

See? I'm not so dumb!

MEG

Jennifer, this is the twenty-first century! Today a hospice is--

BOB

. . . a kind of hospital!

JENNIFER

No. It's different. The patients don't need intensive treatments, like operations and stuff. They just need good bedside care.

BOB

They can't get it at home?. . . From their mothers?. . . Or their wives?

MEG

Not even from their fathers or their husbands!

BOB

Whoops!

JENNIFER

They're terminal.

BOB

Terminal? Like on a car battery?

MEG

Terminal. Like at a bus station. . . . The end of the line.

BOB

You mean they're gonna--

MEG

Not while we're working with them, Silly. Ms. Woodson won't put us with anybody that's gonna--

JENNIFER

That Ms. Woodson always looks so nice. . . I wish I could--

MEG

Wishing won't do it. It takes work.

JENNIFER

To get dressed? How much work? You always look perfect, Meg.

MEG

I know. . . . It's no accident I was in the Prom Queen's court last year.

JENNIFER

You were picked just for your looks? Isn't it important to be a good person?

MEG

Of course! But if you look like a mouse, you can do good things all day long and nobody'll ever notice.

JENNIFER

I look like a mouse?

MEG

Do you feel like one?

JENNIFER

No, but sometimes I feel invisible. . . and sometimes I wish I were. . . so people couldn't see me. Maybe if I looked better. . . but I don't even know where to start.

MEG

You could start by combing your hair. . .

JENNIFER

What?

MEG

And wear clothes that fit. . . match your colors--

BOB

Meg!

MEG

She asked, didn't she?

JENNIFER

Yeah, I guess I did.

BOB

It all sounds pretty shallow to me.

MEG

Then what are you doing in this program? We're here to help people look good. . . so they can feel better about themselves. If you don't believe that, you shouldn't be here.

JENNIFER

Is that why you're here?

MEG

Of course!

BOB
Gimme a break.

MEG
Okay. . . I'm here for the extra credit.

BOB
Stow it! Here comes Ms. Woodson.

They look off, apparently toward Anne Woodson.

JENNIFER
What's that case? It's way too big to be a purse.

BOB
Oh, I dunno. With all the stuff some chicks carry. . .

MEG
Chicks?

BOB
Uhhh. . . birds?

JENNIFER
Birds?

BOB
Broads?

MEG
Bob!

BOB
Girls!

MEG
Try "Women"!

BOB
Okay. With all the stuff some women carry--

MEG
Shhh! She'll hear you.

Anne enters, carrying a large case.

ANNE
Hello, everyone.

JENNIFER

Hullo, Miss Woodson.

MEG

Hi.

BOB

Hello, Ms. Woodson.

ANNE

We're going to be working together, so we'll get to know each other pretty well. Why don't you call me Anne?

BOB

Okay.

ANNE

You got here early. I hope that means you're anxious to get started?

The three groan as Anne smiles.

BOB

I'm not so sure now.

ANNE

Try to harness that enthusiasm while I speak with Mrs. Ryan. I think she's interested in our program. Let me make sure, then I'll call you in.

As the teens wait in the hall, Anne taps on Mrs. Ryan's door, then opens it a bit.

Mrs. Ryan? May I come in? It's Anne Woodson, Eileen's friend.

LIGHTS UP on Mrs. Ryan, who rouses herself with effort as the blue light fades. Although near death, she acts lively before visitors.

MRS. RYAN

Anne? Come in, Dear.

Anne enters Mrs. Ryan's room, closes the door, walks over to the elderly woman and touches her arm.

ANNE

Hello, Mrs. Ryan.

The following conversations, in the hallway and Mrs. Ryan's room, are intercut and somewhat overlapping.

MRS. RYAN

Hello, Anne. (Seeing bag)
You've brought lots of make-up. Do you think
you can make me look like a movie star?

ANNE
Who'd you have in mind?

MRS. RYAN
Greta Garbo? Ingrid Bergman? Marlene Dietrich?

ANNE
Well, they're all--

MRS. RYAN
DEAD! But I'm not!

JENNIFER
Have you seen any of the patients yet?

BOB
A few. They look really old.

MEG
They look really dead!

ANNE
If we make you up, you know you'll still look like yourself--

MRS. RYAN
What a pity!

ANNE
. . . but at your very best.

BOB
You sure this isn't a mortuary?

MEG
Funny! You know we're here to help groom
some of the patients.

JENNIFER
I'd rather be in detention!

MRS. RYAN
It's a new program?

ANNE
You'd be one of the very first. It's "More Than Skin Deep."

MRS. RYAN
What is?

ANNE

Beauty.

MRS. RYAN

That's what they tell you when you're old and wrinkly, that beauty's only skin deep.

ANNE

We say it's more than skin deep. The people at Lady Beautiful Cosmetics have changed the old cliché. We believe you'll feel beautiful inside when you look good outside.

MRS. RYAN

Do you believe in the tooth fairy too?

JENNIFER

I'd rather go to the prom with my brother!

BOB

How did we get into this?

MEG

Extra credit.

JENNIFER

How do we get out of it?

MRS. RYAN

You're sure my granddaughter wants me to do it?

ANNE

Eileen thinks it's a wonderful idea.

MRS. RYAN

What do I have to do?

ANNE

Nothing. Lady Beautiful pays for the cosmetics and my time. I train high-school volunteers to do the grooming.

MRS. RYAN

Volunteers? Why would young people want to deal with the dying?

ANNE

They believe in the program.

MRS. RYAN

Ah, the optimism of youth!

ANNE

It's easy to be skeptical, but they really are excited about being here.

I'd rather be at the dentist's office.
(turning suddenly)
Well, let's go home.

Yeah, but I thought it'd be different. . . . Come *on*.

MEG

This place smells like my dentist's office.

JENNIFER

BOB

(pulling her back.)
Whoa! We just got here, Squirt!

JENNIFER

Jennifer turns to exit again, grabbing Bob's arm as she goes. Meg grabs his other arm. He is caught in a tug-of-war between them.

MEG

Bob and I are staying.

JENNIFER

(To Bob) Is that true?

BOB

If that's what Meg wants.... Besides, I need the extra credit.

JENNIFER

You won't drive me home?

BOB

You'll have to take a bus.

JENNIFER

I don't wanna take a bus.

BOB

Then take a hike!

JENNIFER

Okay, Okay, I'll stay.

MRS. RYAN

They could be enjoying the sunshine on such a beautiful day.

ANNE

Believe me, they're delighted to be here.

JENNIFER

I'd rather be in the yearbook with zits all over my face.

BOB

We could be down by the lake--

MEG

. . . or walking in the park.

MRS. RYAN

You'd have had a tough time getting me here when I was a kid.

ANNE

Well, there is the matter of the extra credit.

MRS. RYAN

So there is an ulterior motive.

ANNE

Call it an incentive.

MRS. RYAN

I'd call it a bribe!

MEG

(To Jennifer) Why'd you sign up, anyway? You certainly don't need extra credit.

JENNIFER

(In a small voice) I wanted to learn how to . . . I just wanted to be with you guys, OK? . . . and I thought I'd get a make-over.

MEG

OK. You're with us. Now calm down.

JENNIFER

No make-over?

MEG

I'll make you over!

BOB

(vamping seductively to Meg.) Will you make me over too?

MRS. RYAN

The young people will come here regularly?

ANNE

Twice a week.

MRS. RYAN

. . . and make me look pretty?

ANNE

You and others.

MRS. RYAN

They've got a major overhaul with me--

ANNE

Nonsense!

MRS. RYAN

. . . and I'm not going to live forever. . . .
When do we start?

ANNE

Right now.

Anne opens the door and beckons the teens, who enter reluctantly. Lights out on the hall area.

ANNE

Come on over. Don't be shy.

The teens move awkwardly to Mrs. Ryan.

ANNE

This is Mrs. Ryan. Her granddaughter Eileen is my best friend. We used to visit Mrs. Ryan before Eileen moved away.

The teens nod or wave ad lib.

MRS. RYAN

She's been gone for years. I've grown much older.

ANNE

(squeezing Mrs. Ryan's hand)

We both have.

MRS. RYAN

No. You've grown up; I've grown old.

(looking at the teens)

You brought a whole team to whip me into shape. What's the boy doing here?

(to Bob)

Are you interested in make-up, Son?

BOB

Well. . . I'm really more interested in graduating.

JENNIFER

He's really most interested in Meg.

Meg reacts smugly; Bob is embarrassed.

ANNE

(to Mrs. Ryan)

You know, I just spoke with Eileen yesterday.

MRS. RYAN

You talked to Eileen?

Mrs. Ryan is hurt, left out. She hesitates, then speaks defensively.

MRS. RYAN

(Making it up as she goes?)

I spoke with her too, but she didn't mention you.

ANNE

She phoned?

MRS. RYAN

Oh, no! (pause) Uh. . . I saw her on the TV.

ANNE

What show?

MRS. RYAN

No show. Any show. It doesn't matter. I don't even have to turn the TV on.

Anne, Bob, Meg and Jennifer exchange glances.

ANNE

Eileen is concerned about you.

(unconvincingly)

She's planning to visit soon.

MRS. RYAN

(making it up?)

Oh, I know, Dear, but she can't come. . . well. . . because of the baby.

ANNE

Eileen doesn't have a baby.

MRS. RYAN

No, but she will soon.

ANNE

Really? She didn't mention it.

MRS. RYAN

(Making it up?) She doesn't know yet. So far she thinks she's got the flu. When she does find out, she'll plan to call it June because she'll expect a little girl in June.

ANNE

She'll call her baby June?

MRS. RYAN

(Making it up?) No, no, Dear. The baby will be a little boy, born on the 4th of July, so she'll call him Sam instead for Uncle Sam.

ANNE

How do you know all of this?

MRS. RYAN

Melvin! My medium.

Anne, Meg, Bob and Jennifer are startled. Then Anne begins to laugh gently.

ANNE

Oh, I see. You're kidding me now! For a second you had me going, but now I know you're joking. You were always such a religious person. I know you don't believe--

MRS. RYAN

Didn't believe! Not until Melvin showed up one day.

Meg nudges Bob. Mrs. Ryan sees this, turns away.

ANNE

Showed up?

MRS. RYAN

On my TV! It happened just after I learned I was going to die.

ANNE

That must have been frightening.

MRS. RYAN

Of course it was!

(with deep feeling but no self-pity)

When the doctor told me, I got scared. "There's some mistake," I told her. "The tests are wrong." . . .

She just touched my arm, and that's when I knew. . . Then I got angry! . . . Well, I couldn't spend the rest of my days feeling sorry for myself. There was nothing left but to accept the fact I'm dying.

ANNE

You're very brave.

MRS. RYAN

Nonsense. I have no other choice. But I've been worrying about my dear Daddy. Who will care for him if I go first?

JENNIFER

Daddy? Your father's alive? He must be a zillion!

MRS. RYAN

He's nearly 93--and of course he's not my father. Tom Ryan and I started calling each other "Mommy" and "Daddy" in front of our son Michael. We did it for so many years that it stuck.

ANNE

Michael? He was Eileen's father, wasn't he?

MRS. RYAN

I thought you might remember. After the accident, it was just Daddy and me again. . . and of course Eileen. We've been married for 72 years now, and I know Daddy still needs me. . . . But I can't move these old bones anymore. How can I help somebody else? . . . Thinking about the future only upset me, so I started to concentrate on the past. That's when Melvin appeared. He's been a great comfort to me.

ANNE

(Amused) Mrs. Ryan, you don't really have a medium.

The teens are skeptical, although Jennifer looks to the TV. Mrs. Ryan ignores Meg's open disdain.

MRS. RYAN

Well, not exactly. A medium is a pathway that lets you communicate with people who are dead. But Melvin connects me with people who're still alive. That's most unusual, you know. In fact, it's rare. (Twinkling) I guess you'd call my medium rare.

The visitors laugh politely.

BOB

Wait a minute. Your medium helps you communicate with people who're alive? I get it! Melvin's your telephone, right?

MRS. RYAN

Oh, no, Dear. Nice try, but Melvin's more than just a switchboard. . . . Well, you may not believe in such things.

BOB

I don't know whether I believe it or not.

MRS. RYAN

Well, I never did before. . . and maybe I still don't. . . but then suddenly Melvin pops up again on my TV.

(peering up at Bob)

What's your name, Son?

BOB

Bob.

Mrs. Ryan extends her hand; Bob doesn't respond.

MRS. RYAN

How do you do, Bob? I'm Eloise Ryan. Lean down and shake my hand, would you, Son?

Bob does so. Mrs. Ryan examines his face.

Not a bad-looking lad. Not bad at all. Pleased to meet you, Bob.

BOB

Nice to meet you too.

Mrs. Ryan releases Bob and turns to Meg.

MRS. RYAN

And you are . . . ?

With great confidence, Meg saunters over and quickly extends her hand but Mrs. Ryan doesn't take it.

MEG

(Confused) I'm Meg.

MRS. RYAN

(Ignoring her hand)

No, Dear. You've got it backwards. Nice try, though. . . . Oh, Dear. I shouldn't correct your manners, should I?

Mrs. Ryan looks to Anne, who nods in approval.

MRS. RYAN

Well, perhaps I should. The lady offers her hand first to a gentleman, but what happens when there are two ladies?

MEG

I don't know.

MRS. RYAN

The older woman decides whether she wants to shake hands, so I must extend my hand first.

Mrs. Ryan does so and they shake hands.

Very happy to meet you, Meg. Please bend down so these old eyes can see you.

Meg leans down as they shake hands, then straightens again.

MRS. RYAN

Hmm. Interesting profile.

Bob and Jennifer enjoy this comment immensely. Meg is irritated as Mrs. Ryan releases her hand.

MRS. RYAN

Wasn't there another one?

Jennifer backs away.

What happened to the pipsqueak?

JENNIFER

What?!

MRS. RYAN

Ah, I thought that would get you!
(extending her hand)
How do you do? I'm Eloise Ryan.

Jennifer shakes Mrs. Ryan's hand with dignity.

JENNIFER

I'm Jennifer Summers, and I am not a pipsqueak!

MRS. RYAN

Of course you're not, Jennifer. In fact, there's something special about you. Let's have a look.

Jennifer refuses to bend and instead backs away stiffly.