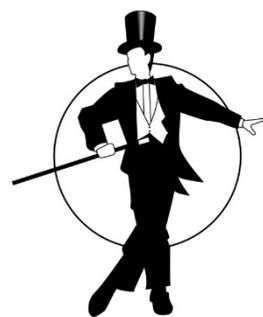


Mernie's Little Hoax

Carol A. Nimmons



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Synopsis: Mernie, a rich widow living in *the Golden Gate Retirement Village*, aka *Retire Here, Expire Here*, is concerned because she has no known heirs to her large fortune. She devises a hoax to see who among her so-called loyal friends might be candidates in her will. When her fake demise backfires, she becomes the victim of crazy shenanigans plotted by a network of unpredictable retirees.

In appreciation

I am deeply grateful and indebted to T.A. Powell for her contributions during the creation of *Mernie's Little Hoax*. Her help in the preparation of this play is a natural extension of her artistic abilities and her willingness to help others.

Thank you!
Carol A. Nimmons

MERNIE'S LITTLE HOAX

By Carol A. Nimmons

CAST

MERNIE MAYHEM: resident of Golden Gate Retirement Community (GGRC), loves practical jokes, likely cheater at cards, millionaire

MAXINE: resident of GGRC, devious

SALLY: resident of GGRC, somewhat flighty

HELEN: housekeeper of GGRC, alcohol-loving

HERMAN: resident of GGRC, spends most of his time napping in his wheelchair; often responds to loud noises by yelling bingo

NELLIE: resident of GGRC who tries to be friends with Maxine, Mernie and Sally

STANLEY: resident of GGRC, hen-pecked husband of Nellie

SADIE: gossip-loving resident of GGRC

ACTIVITIES DIRECTOR: Employee of GGRC, flamboyant and quirky

JUDGE: Stern and serious

WALK-ONS/SECURITY GUARD: Optional extra, non-speaking

Place

Gathering room of the upscale Golden Gate Retirement Community's clubhouse, aka
"Retire Here, Expire Here"

Time

Present
The Present.

MERNIE'S LITTLE HOAX

Setting: The gathering room in the clubhouse is a comfortable room with coat rack, tables, chairs, bookcase, and art. There are 2 signs, one pointing to the restaurant, one listing activities; a card table with a bowl of pretzels; the bar counter has highball glasses, cups, bottles, and a sign, "Honor System, Drinks \$4."

At Rise: Herman is asleep in his wheelchair while Helen is behind the counter cleaning and drinking.

HELEN: *(singing)* 99 bottles of beer on the wall, 99 bottles of beer! Take one down and pass it around, 98 bottles of beer of the wall. 98 bottles of beer on the —
Oooooooh...Scotch! *(glances to see if anyone is watching, puts down her duster, opens the bottle, sniffs, pours, drinks, and slaps the counter several times. She repeats this sequence.)*
97 glasses of scotch on the wall...97 glasses of scotch! Take one down...and then another...

(hears someone, wipes and returns the glass, checks her breath, ducks behind the bar. Maxine enters carrying chicken outfits, walks to the bar, reads the sign. As she walks behind the bar, Helen crawls around to the front. Maxine pours herself a glass of scotch and a second glass with water or soda, takes both back to the card table.

Helen crawls back behind the counter, peeks to look at Maxine, sneaks another drink, stands. Maxine starts shuffling cards. Sally enters.)

HELEN: *(hiccup)*

SALLY: Oh! Hello, Helen. Sorry if I'm late, Maxine. I went to Martha Ann Hatcher's birthday party. She's 102 years old!

HELEN: I know. *(belches and takes a pretzel)* I dusted her yesterday.

MAXINE: Helen! Get back to work. Go dust Herman over there. He hasn't moved in the last hour. Wonder why I wasn't invited? But that's okay. I wouldn't want to be part of that social security network, anyway.

HELEN: Herman's good. I dust him on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It's only Wednesday.

(Maxine and Helen fuss with cards. Helen dusts Herman who slips from the chair. She struggles to replace his limp body).

SALLY: Well, I think I must have been the youngest one there! Everybody else appeared to be over 80! It was funny when someone asked her "What was the best thing about being 102 years old?"

MAXINE: I know. I have heard that one before. She must have said "no peer pressure!"

HELEN: No peer pressure! Hahahahaha! More pretzels, girls?

SALLY/MAXINE: No!

(Sally/Maxine go back to cards; Helen stuffs a bottle into her cleavage)

HELEN: Guess I'll be on my way then. You girls have fun! I know, I will. *(laughs and starts to leave, cleaning as she goes)*

MAXINE: No peer pressure huh?

SALLY: No peer pressure, that's exactly what she said. How much are we playing for today?

MAXINE: *(shuffling cards)* What we usually play for, the buck. We can play three-hand poker when Mernie gets here. But you know, don't you, that you have to watch out for her? I never trust her at cards. She cheats.

SALLY: Is that a nice thing to say?

MAXINE: No. But sometimes I am not a nice person.

SALLY: The community hotline, Sadie says her husband left her \$15 million when he died. You know which one Sadie is? The one who gushes and smiles all the time?

(Herman picks up newspaper, starts to read, falls asleep and snores. Maxine makes a loud noise)

HERMAN: Bingo!! *(falls back asleep)*

MAXINE: Oh, you mean all that flattery? "Oh, Sally you are wearing the most beautiful dress I have ever seen." I used to think she smiled all the time, because she'd gotten a bad

batch of Botox, or couldn't hear. But she can hear well enough to pass on what she hears through the community hotline! If you want to get the word out—any word at all—just call Sadie Soy. We will play cards later. We need to practice now for the talent contest. Our activities director here at our beloved Golden Gate Retirement Community, what we call '*Retire here, Expire Here*' is planning a big show. I heard one resident is juggling rolling pins. Don't know what the other contestants are doing.

(Helen overhears and exits quickly)

SALLY: ...other contestants are doing.

MAXINE: That's what *I just* said. When are you going to go to the doctor, maybe a psychiatrist, to see about your problem of repeating what someone says and why you do it so much?

SALLY: Why I do it so much? It's like Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. O.C.D. It started when I moved here. I know I don't repeat all the time, but *most* of the time.

MAXINE: You're right. Most of the time! Well, maybe you can try what the doctor had me do when I couldn't sleep because I was so scared. I was so scared after seeing *The Walking Dead*, I couldn't go to sleep and if I did sleep *any*," I had nightmares... *(hands her a rubber band)*. Put this rubber band on your wrist and when you start repeating, snap the heck out of it!

SALLY: Did it cure you?

MAXINE: Sort of. Part 1 didn't scare me anymore, but then Part 2 started taking me over. Eventually it went away. The doctor said I was a case study for the books. Don't you dare tell anybody about me, though. But it might work on you. And, I am going to let you know when you repeat!

(Maxine stands and picks up their chicken outfits. Sally stands and follows very closely behind.)
It gets on my nerves.

(Maxine stops suddenly; Sally stops suddenly)

SALLY: It gets on my nerves. Ouch!

(Maxine hands Sally her chicken outfit, they put the costumes on; they do not see Helen who enters in her chicken "outfit" of yellow plastic gloves on her toes and a duster "tail" placed in her back pocket. The music starts and Sally and Maxine start to dance the Chicken Dance. Helen mimics. Herman watches, amused)

Directors Note: Find music and steps for the Chicken Dance online. The dance has two main parts. The first uses movements to demonstrate chicken beaks, wings, tail feathers, and then clapping. This is repeated four times. The second part of the song is 32 counts of a polka tune during which Sally and Maxine tell the following jokes and to which Helen responds with laughs, drinks from a flask, dancing and twirls on the floor.

MAXINE: Sally, how does a chicken tell time?

SALLY: One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock...

SALLY: Maxine, why do hens lay eggs?

MAXINE: Because if they dropped them, they'd break!

MAXINE: Sally, why didn't the chicken cross the road?

SALLY: Because KFC was on the other side!

(Both laugh, music fades and Mernie enters)

HELEN: *(laughs, smacks lips, scratches belly)* Hmm...KFC? Makes me a little hungry. Guess I'll go clean the cafeteria next! *(exits)*

MERNIE: Well, if you two don't mind making fools of yourself, it will be Pr-e-t-t-y funny! Hey, watch this! Herman! Hey... Herman! B-52!

HERMAN: Bingo! Incoming! *(starts reading the newspaper, falls back asleep)*

(Sally and Maxine remove outfits and hang them on a coat rack. The three sit at the card table.)

MERNIE: Heh, heh...works every time. That old geezer is as old as this morning's pastries! Can't tell the difference between a bingo game and a bomb raid! How long has he been here?

MAXINE: *(dealing cards)* Don't know, really. Didn't see him at last month's "Introduce the New Folks" meeting! Hey... maybe we should ask him to join our poker group, since we are all available, he might be too. Free and easy! That's us—just some old harmless widows.

SALLY: Harmless widows.

(Maxine pops Sally's rubber band. Mernie sees Nellie and Stanley entering)

Hey look! There's old Nosy Nellie and her husband, old—what's his name? She's just dying to get into our little group!

MAXINE: His name is, Stanley. Stanley and Nellie, something. She's a few years younger than he is. She's 82 and he's, well—Sadie said she thought he was at least six years older. So he'd be, he'd be...88!

HERMAN: B-88! Bingo!! *(falls asleep, snoring)*

MERNIE: Hmm—Maybe he does know the difference between bomb raids and...

NELLIE: Oh, there you are girls! I lost you after breakfast. So, what are we playing today? Need another player? I was just sending Stanley *(elbows him)* to go finish doing the laundry.

MERNIE: Mahjong...uh, with cards! Want to join us?

MAXINE: *(whispers)* You don't play mahjong with cards!

MERNIE: *(whispers)* I know that, but she doesn't. *(to Stan)* So? How about it, Stan? You and Nell want to join in? Gotta be better than doing laundry! We could make it a fivesome.

STAN: No laundry, and a fivesome, with you young lovely ladies?

HERMAN: A-5! Bingo!! *(falls asleep, snoring)*

MAXINE: You think he'd want to join this group too?

SALLY: That would make it a sixsome. An even number! We could play—

NELLIE: Well. I'm not certain I know how to play mahjong with cards. I always thought it was played with those tiny little painted tiles. Like dominos, only, Chinese dominos, sort of. Right, Stanley?

STAN: Yes, little tiles like in Scrabble. Only with funny little Chinese characters painted on them. Why, I remember when I was overseas. Gosh, I was just a young lad in the military, traveling the world, tasting the many "pleasures" of life.

MERNIE: Oh. Yes. Well, that is the Chinese version. This here is the uh, the uh, the, the *Appalachian* version!

SALLY: The what?

MERNIE: Yes, it's so sad. Poor things, those little Appalachians. They couldn't afford real tiles there, just these little ole paper cards! This is much simpler. And cheaper.

SALLY: Yes. Appalachian mahjong!

STANLEY: Hmmm. Looks like a game of 21, or poker to me? Those are playing cards!

MAXINE: Why yes. Everyone in Appalachia has a deck of cards. No food. Just these little ole paper cards to keep their hopes up.

SALLY: And moonshine! They drink moonshine, because they can't afford the tiles!

NELLIE: Well, I'm afraid I'm not familiar with that particular version and Stan and I don't, well, we don't drink the devil's juice. Soooooo, I'll just have to do a little research on the internet and get back to you, girls. Come along, dear. The laundry's not going to do itself, you know!"

STANLEY: But I wanted to stay and play with the girls! Let me stay please. I just wanted to stay and play with the girls. Please?

NELLIE: Maybe after you get the laundry done. Now march, Stanley! My soap opera is about to come on!

(they exit; Helen enters chewing a piece of chicken)

HELEN: Stay strong Stanley! *(She raises her flask and takes a swig.)*

SALLY: That poor, poor man. She browbeats him so!

MAXINE: Did you hear her? Well, I declare! Moonshine. The devil's juice.

MERNIE: To the devil's juice! *(she toasts and drinks)*

HELEN: *(at the bar)* To the devil's juice! *(sneaks another bottle and exits)*

MAXINE: That Nellie needs to get a new job! And besides, moonshine. Why that's nothing more than plain old flat Diet Sprite in your glass, Mernie. And that wasn't very nice to Nellie! *Appalachian mahjong!* Nobody's that dumb.

SALLY: Yea. Now we're going to have to learn how to play that silly game before she gets back! Hit me again, Maxine.

MERNIE: Nobody's that dumb, huh?

MAXINE: *(Sarcastically)* Yes! Sally's right and we haven't got a Chinese tile among us. So, what are you gonna tell her when she comes back all fired up to play your fictitious game of Appalachian mahjong?

MERNIE: Oh, hold on to your knickers, girls! I'll just tell her that we broke too many tiles and decided to play, strip poker instead! That oughta keep her at bay.

SALLY: But what about her husband? Did you see his eyebrows go up when we said they would make it a nice fivesome? He knows we were talking about cards, right?

MERNIE: Relax, girls. We are not that young and Stan's not that creative. Probably just had a twitch in his eyelid or something. Besides, Nosy Nellie would never let old Stanley out of her sight. And anyway, it'll take her at least a week to figure out how to spell the word, mahjong, before she can even do any research on it!

HERMAN: Bingo!

SALLY: Yes. Bingo! *(Maxine snaps the rubber band. Sally rubs her wrist.)* Oooooouch! I don't think this silly cure is doing me much good so far.

MAXINE: Another card?

MERNIE: I'll hold. I heard about a silly rubber band cure before. It was supposed to stop this grown woman from being scared of horror movies. A local doctor wrote about it in a magazine. Imagine. A grown woman!

MAXINE: Busted.

MERNIE: *(lays cards down)* 21! *(Mernie rakes up the poker chips, Maxine deals again, Sally signals for a card; Mernie signals for a card, adds a chip. Maxine takes a card. Mernie lays cards down, rakes up poker chips)*

HELEN: *(enters with a duster and bottle)* I wish I were *(hiccup)* 21 again. *(exits)*

SALLY, MAXINE, MERNIE: Here, here! *(raise glasses in toast, Maxine deals)*

SALLY: Why are you always so lucky, Mernie?

MERNIE: Don't know. Just am! I'll hold. You know our hotline, Sadie, well she gushes over me for being *so* lucky, too. Always bragging on me for winning at poker, having such pretty jewelry. She even drools over my Mercedes. She wants to join our poker group and I don't know what to tell her. There are others we could invite; other than Stan and Nosie Nellie. We could check out other prospects, if you want. Preferably, men.

HERMAN: Bingo!

SALLY: Bingo! *(Maxine starts to pop Sally's wrist, but Sally beats her to it)* Ooooooouch!!

MAXINE: What about old Herman, there?

MERNIE: Herman? He can barely hold his head up, let alone a hand of cards.

SALLY: Things are pretty quiet around here now lately. No divorces or scandals going on. Just the usual: Sunday buffets, golfing, charades after dinner. It's pretty dull.

MERNIE: Except for old Herman there. He's a real mystery!

HERMAN: Bingo!

MAXINE: Yes. Yes he is! Nobody knows much about him, even Sadie. Why, he could be anything.

SALLY: A retired airline pilot, a former foreign spy, or an old newspaper editor.

MERNIE: Nope. Old Herman there is just as boring as his name. He's just an old man with a penchant for bingo.

MAXINE: You're right. Even our mystery man Herman here, is a dull mystery.

HERMAN: Bingo!

MERNIE: Well, we're all bored because everybody knows everything about everybody in our little old community. Where you 'retire here and expire here!' There's no pizazz left in this place!

(Helen enters with a vacuum cleaner she struggles to pull the cord out)

SALLY: No pizazz. *(Snaps rubber band)* Ouch! Or mystery. Every day, it's the same old thing: sweet potato soufflé on Sundays, mac-n-cheese on Mondays, tacos on Tuesdays, beef Wellington on Wednesdays, goulash on Thursdays, fried fish on Fridays, seafood salad on Satur...

HELEN: But, Thursday starts with a T...why would they serve Goulash, which starts with a G? *(she has about 6-8 feet of cord and plug which she holds like a microphone. The melody of "My Favorite Things" from the Sound of Music begins)*

HERMAN: I love Goulash!

HELEN: *(Motions to the light booth)* Hit it boys! *(to the tune of "My Favorite Things")* Soufflés on Sundays, mac-n-Cheese on Mondays, tacos on Tuesdays, beef Wellington on Wednesdays, fresh tarts on Thursdays *(laughing)* Tarts on Thursdays! Get it... Tarts...

HERMAN: Stanley would like tarts on Thursdays! *(laughs and then coughs violently)*

HELEN: *(Slaps Herman on the back)* Stanley would like tarts every day of the week after being married to Nellie for over 52 years! *(points at the light booth)* Hit it boys! *(sings into the cord a phrase or so as the music fades)* Thank you, thank you very much... try the veal...I'll be here through Thursday! *(bows and exits)*

MERNIE: She's a hoot! Fresh tarts on Thursdays. What a card!

MAXINE: Hey, wait! I saw something new! Did you see the green flyer in the lobby? The investment guy is having the program at our next meeting. You get the free meal and listen to him about wills and estate planning. I go for the *meal* and not his *spiel*! He wants to be sure we have done our financial planning, wills and all.

SALLY: You know, I've already done my will. Everything is going to my only child.

MAXINE: Well, I had better get on the stick about that. Never too early to get things like that taken care of.

MERNIE: You know, I don't have *anyone* to leave anything to.

MAXINE: No one?

SALLY: Really? Not a soul?

MERNIE: Rumor has it, I have a distant, distant relative living somewhere in Washington state. My mother mentioned them once. Funny name of H. O. Saddlebottom. Never met or saw them, though. Don't even know if it's a man or a woman. I will have to be very careful who I leave any money to. Right Herman? Can't trust anybody these days.

HERMAN: Bingo! H. O.... Saddlebottom ...O. H....Bottomsaddle! G-47! Bingo! Incoming! (*ducks under his blanket and peeks out, smiles at Mernie*)

MERNIE: Bingo! Bottomsaddle...incoming! Herman, you're a riot! I'll be right back in a minute, girls. (*exit*)

SALLY: What did she say? I'm cured!

MAXINE: Great! The one time I *need* you to be able to repeat something and suddenly you're cured! You don't recall the name she said?

SALLY: She said two. Or was that Herman? Ohhhh, which name was the right one, again? Uhm m m m m m, I don't know. What did Herman say? Bottomsaddle, H.O.? H. I.? That was the last thing I heard her say. Right? (*She snaps her wrist*) Ouch!

Maxine: What are you doing that for? I thought you said you were cured?

SALLY: I was hoping it might work in reverse! (*She snaps her wrist*) Ooooooch!

HERMAN: Bingo! Reverse! Bottomsaddle, O. H!

MAXINE: Bingo! Bottomsaddle, O. H., it is! Thanks Herman.

HERMAN: (*yawns and pretends sleep*)

MAXINE: And how much did Sadie say 'ole Mernie was worth?

SALLY: \$15 million. See... I really am cured! (*removes rubber band from wrist*)

MERNIE: (*enters waving investment flyer*) Here's the flier, girls. It says "Make your plans before it's too late. I will help you. Come to my 'Plan While you Can' seminar at the Golden Gate Retirement Community" It's coming up soon.

MAXINE: We need to talk about this. I mean, we *really* need to think about this.

MERNIE: When you have as much money as I do, how do you know whether somebody likes you for the money or for who you are? I guess I won't know until I am up there looking down.

SALLY: According to Sadie, the couple who live in unit #12 had a little confrontation over his inheritance. He didn't understand why his wife was ignoring him for so long, so he asked her, "Did you marry me because my grandfather left me \$6 million dollars?" "Don't be silly," she said, "I couldn't care less who left it to you."

MAXINE: Well, whomever you leave yours to, Mernie, they sure will be lucky.

SALLY: They sure will be lucky...I'm just saying.

MERNIE: You know, I do need to be thinking about my will in case something were to happen, but, who around here is worthy to be mentioned in my will? It certainly won't be that gushy Sadie whatever her last name is. I can see a gold digger from a mile away!

HERMAN: From a mile a... (*laughs and exits pushing his wheelchair; sound of him crashing into something*)...wayyyyyyyyyyyyyyy....

SALLY: And certainly not Nosie Nellie. You never liked her.

MAXINE: Or Stan....or...

MERNIE: Hmm...Wouldn't it be something if I went to my own memorial service to see how many are choked up or hear personal comments about me? I could decide who gets or doesn't get in my will at that time. That would be funny! I could fake my own death!

SALLY: Fake your own death...I hope you are not serious!

MERNIE: Of course, I am not serious. Or, maybe I am! Hah! (*Mernie jumps up*) I am going to do it! Girls, I want you to send out the word. You'll have to use the hotline, Sadie. She will take care of it as she always does, when there's news or scandal. You tell

her that I have suddenly passed on from some strange and rare disease, and there will be a memorial service, here. But I've got to have a week or so to line up the phony death certificate and everything else to put into place before.

(Helen and Herman enter, she's pushing his wheelchair)

MERNIE: They just started a game of bingo down the hall. Better hurry if you want Herman to join!

HERMAN: Bingo! *(Helen wheels Herman past the bar, she grabs another bottle; they exit)*

SALLY: What did she say? *(takes notes on a napkin)* She needs another week to line things up, get a phony death certificate.

MAXINE: So, you are going to line things up, get a phony death certificate, and then what? Just lie in a casket pretending to be dead?

MERNIE: Don't be silly, Maxine! I can't hold my breath that long, or that straight of a face! Nooooo. I'll just go with an old urn stuffed full of ashes. I'll get the urn and you all can get the ashes from old Herman's pipe ashtray and Sadie can unwittingly get the word out. *(strikes a pose and pretends to faint)*

MAXINE: So, you want to see what everybody says about you, so you can come back alive and rub it in their faces and change your ways?

MERNIE: Why, would I rub anything in anybody's face? Or change my ways? I just want to know who my true friends are.

MAXINE: Well

SALLY: Well

MERNIE: Well, well, c'mon! Wouldn't you be the least bit curious too, if you had my kind of money and nowhere to leave it? I think it will be hilarious! But, I can't just show up at my own funeral, can I? Or can I? You two will just have to tell me *all* about it. Besides, it is serving another purpose.

MAXINE: Which is?

SALLY: What?

MERNIE: Pure entertainment! Pure entertainment! Like Herman. He's a gem! Makes me laugh every time I hear him holler bingo! And it will liven up this boring place, don't you think? Just make sure Herman and Helen come! I can just hear it now. Angels singing and then out of nowhere! G-47! Bingo! It will be a real hoot. And Helen? Lord only knows what she will do, but at least I'll know who my real friends are.

MAXINE: Okay, okay. We'll invite Herman and Helen and we'll give you a full report, Mernie, since you are going to so much trouble.

SALLY: How are you going to, I mean—how are you going to make your comeback, Mernie, without upsetting everybody with your fake death?

MERNIE: Don't be silly! I won't be dead that long. Hahahahaha! Wait! Sally, you really didn't repeat a thing I just said. You're finally cured! How wonderful!

MAXINE: Yes. Yes. How absolutely *wonderful* and rather, *untimely* to be suddenly cured of repeating things!

SALLY: Sorry.

MERNIE: I'm so happy for you, Sally. Besides, it's all in good fun. And anybody who doesn't understand why I had to do it? Well, I believe they'll get over it rather quickly!

MAXINE: (*whispering*) Just as soon as the check clears the bank!

MERNIE: After all, money can buy happiness! I'm living proof!

SALLY: Not for long! (*Maxine pops her wrist*)

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!