

**Rosanna Alfaro**  
**from *Before I Leave You***

ACT I

Scene 1. The Royal East in Cambridge. KOJI (62), EMILY, Koji's wife (61), JEREMY (64), and TRISH, Jeremy's sister (58) are having dinner.

EMILY

(to Jeremy) So you're fine!

JEREMY

I'm fine. It turns out I'm in very good condition for someone my age and morphology. At least that's what my new doctor said. (to Koji) She's Asian and looks like a bright twelve year old.

KOJI

Don't we all. You told her about getting dizzy on the stairs?

JEREMY

Everyone gets dizzy at the top of the stairs.

KOJI

The choking incidents? Did you mention those?

JEREMY

I told her I sometimes had a little difficulty swallowing, and she said very cheerily that since older people have fewer teeth, we should take smaller mouthfuls and chew more slowly.

TRISH

Exactly what I've been telling him. He never listens to his younger sister, but that's exactly what I said.

JEREMY

She looked me in the eye and smiled warmly as she shook my hand goodbye. Isn't it great the way doctors always shake your hand? It's their way of saying, "Don't worry, you're not untouchable. You're still a human being."

KOJI

They reach for the wipes the moment they shut the door behind you.

TRISH

Well, I should certainly hope so. (beat) Regular checkups for you from now on. I know Koji agrees with me.

JEREMY

Koji's a theater director. He overdramatizes. (He serves himself a second helping.) Fortunately I'm fine and can go back to things I love most. The crispy tofu is perfect today.

TRISH

Poor Jeremy! Because of his dreaded checkup, he didn't eat normally last week. He'd open up the refrigerator and talk to his favorite cheeses. "Not today, my little ones."

JEREMY

I've lost four pounds in three days.

KOJI

It doesn't really show until you lose fifteen pounds, but at least you're headed in the right direction.

EMILY

(She laughs.) High praise from Koji. That's the kind of thing he says to his best students.

TRISH

Jeremy has that dangerous apple shape. Apple people don't just have a tire around the middle. Each of their organs sits in its own pocket of fat.

JEREMY

I have this theory that the body is like a car. Sitting in the driveway all week, like reading in bed all day, may not be great, but driving 20,000 miles a year or running three miles before breakfast the way Trish does is much worse. She had an operation on her knees when she was eighteen. My knees are as fresh as a five-year-old's because I never use them. (He gags on something.) Not to worry. False alarm. (He coughs.)

EMILY

You sure you're all right?

JEREMY

It's all this talk about diet and exercise. (He coughs again.)

KOJI

Speaking of which, this morning in the shower I thought of the perfect dinner table game.

JEREMY

I hate games. (He generously serves himself thirds.)

KOJI

But you'll love this. It's called Old Folks' Alphabet.

TRISH

Sounds like a game Jeremy should be really good at.

KOJI

It's the best idea I've had in years – Emily could turn it into a picture book for the nursing home set. Here's how it goes. We go round and round the table eliminating people until there's only one of us left standing. We begin, "A is for Alzheimer's, B is for boils."

JEREMY

C is for the big C.

EMILY

D is for diarrhea. Sorry for bringing this up at the dinner table.

TRISH

I don't know any words that begin with E.

KOJI

Embolism?

JEREMY

Enema.

KOJI

X-ray.

TRISH

That's cheating. That begins with X. I hate this game.

EMILY

I couldn't agree more.

JEREMY tries to speak and can't. No one notices.

KOJI

Come on, Trish.

TRISH

It's for showoffs.

EMILY notices Jeremy's growing distress.

EMILY

(to Jeremy) Are you all right?

JEREMY can't speak.

EMILY (continued)

(to others) Something's wrong with Jeremy.

KOJI

Waitress!

JEREMY can't breathe. EMILY stands.

EMILY

(to the restaurant at large) Is there a doctor in the house?

JEREMY suddenly recovers. He clears his throat.

JEREMY

It's fine. I'm fine. I'm sorry.

He clears his throat again.

KOJI

(to the restaurant at large) Emergency over. False alarm. Nothing to worry about. Back to your frog legs, everyone.

TRISH

(She giggles.) "Your frog legs?" You mean "chicken feet."

EMILY

(to Jeremy) Are you all right?

KOJI

I bet you didn't really tell the doctor about your swallowing problems. For a supremely intelligent man you're so stupid.

JEREMY

(He clears his throat.) This was completely different from my usual problems - I couldn't talk or breathe.

TRISH

(to Jeremy) Obviously you were eating too fast. I saw you. You were gulping down your food.

KOJI

I was about to try the Heimlich maneuver.

EMILY

You don't know anything about the Heimlich maneuver.

KOJI

There's a poster by the door.

EMILY

(to Jeremy) Are you sure you're all right?

KOJI

Do you feel like vomiting or something?

JEREMY

No. It was more respiratory than digestive, more dry than wet... fortunately. (to Emily) It was as if someone put a plug in my windpipe.

TRISH

Your face puffed up like a balloon. I thought you were a goner.

EMILY

It's probably nothing, but if it happens again you should check with that nice new doctor.

TRISH

(teasingly to Koji) This was all your fault.

KOJI

My fault!

TRISH

It was Jeremy's gut reaction to your Old Folk's Alphabet. (She laughs.)

JEREMY

(to Emily) This is the very first time anything like this has happened. (beat) It's funny - when you're young "the first time" means something great, but when you're our age "the first time" means a heart attack or a stroke.

TRISH

Now look who's overdramatizing. Like the doctor said, he eats too fast. You all saw him wolfing down his food. I keep telling him...

JEREMY

I thought I was going to die.