

Always
By Dana Hall

Stage or Radio Piece

Characters:

Francis: Stage age 70s, Female

Harold: Stage age 70s, Male

Synopsis:

Sometimes you fall in love twice with the same person.

Irvin Berlin's song Always is featured in this piece and is in the public domain.

<https://www.themarysue.com/heres-whats-new-in-the-public-domain-for-2021/>

At Rise: Francis is sitting in a hospital room with her husband Harold. Harold is sitting in a chair with a hospital gown on. He is looking at a Jello cup on a table.

FRANCIS: You should eat something.

HAROLD: I'm not hungry.

FRANCIS: Eat.

Harold reluctantly takes a spoon out of a wrapper on the tray in front of him.

HAROLD: Fine.

He starts to eat the Jello.

HAROLD: This is the worst *ever*.

FRANCIS: *That's* the worst thing? Harold, you had a heart attack!

Harold looks at the label on Jello.

HAROLD: I knew it. It's sugar-free! The worst. They make these just to punish you for being sick.

FRANCIS: You need to eat healthier.

HAROLD: I'm fine...and it wasn't a heart attack- just some blockage. They just want to observe me- you know to rack up the hospital bill.

He whispers as if it is a conspiracy.

I read somewhere a single Tylenol costs 15.00 bucks a pop in here. I should've packed my own.

FRANCIS: Harry-stop.

HAROLD: Relax Frannie.

FRANCIS: You need to take this seriously.

HAROLD: I was serious when I said you'd break my heart one day.

FRANCIS: Seeing you in pain Harry, you don't get it. I- I can't- do this with, without you. I don't know what I would do if something horrible happened. What if I didn't come home in time. You're so stubborn you would've waited - then what. Would it have been too late?

HAROLD: Hey- Hey. Listen, I'm ok. Look at me.

(Pause)

You were right I should've called the doctor sooner but I'm ok now- honey. They put in a stent and the old ticker is doing fine. See.

Harold stands up very slowly and does some very light movement.

FRANCIS: Can I tell you something?

Harold braces himself on the chair and comically holds his heart as he sits on the last part of his line.

HAROLD: Ok- but if it's about how I don't clean my side of the sink maybe it can wait - after all, I did just have a heart attack.

FRANCIS: The paramedics asked me questions. I just stood there frozen.
(truly apologizing) I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

HAROLD: For what? Being human?

FRANCIS: I couldn't remember simple things like your birthday or if you were on any medications/

HAROLD: It's ok. None of that matters now.

FRANCIS: It matters. It mattered to *me*.

HAROLD: These things happen and no one expects them. You were in shock.

FRANCIS: Yes, but I/ (should be able)

HAROLD: Hey- listen. You just being there with me is all that mattered.

FRANCIS: That's kind of you. You know how much I love you?

HAROLD: I know. I love you too.

(Pause)

So, do the kids know I'm here at this resort with basic cable and questionable desserts?

FRANCIS: Yes, I told them you'd be in the hospital for a few days. I called Harry Jr. while you were in surgery. I told him I'd kill you if you didn't make it through.

HAROLD: That's the sweetest death threat I've ever received.

FRANCIS: He sends his love and is flying in as soon as he can get a flight out. Should be here on the weekend.

HAROLD: Oh- tell him not to bother. Let's not make a big deal about this dear.

FRANCIS turns on her cellphone and is searching as HAROLD continues talking.

HAROLD: Are you calling him? Good. If he's coming, he still has my 9 iron tell him to bring it. Do you think they'd let him on the plane with it? You tell him for me- not. to. trust. baggage. claim.

Francis starts playing Irvin Berlin's Always... it's on for a few lines then she turns it off.

HAROLD: Hey- that's our song. Let it play a moment.

They listen as Always by Irvin Berlin plays on Francis's phone.

FRANCIS: I played it over and over in the waiting room. I don't have headphones so I sat off in the corner with the phone pressed to my ear. Listening. Praying.

HAROLD: Boy does that take me back.

Harold hums a little.

You know, I knew when you came into the shop that afternoon that I'd marry you.

FRANCIS: Oh stop- you did not.

HAROLD: Did so. When I got off work I went straight home and told my mom. You know what she said?

FRANCIS/HAROLD: Is she catholic?

They share a laugh.

FRANCIS: She never liked me.

HAROLD: Well, you were a Protestant.

FRANCIS: No, she got over that - She said I was "too thin."

HAROLD: Ha. She was something. She only said that because she was afraid to lose her baby boy to such a vixen.

FRANCIS: Oh please - that was not it.

HAROLD: It was- it's true. The summer of 68' what were we -- 20...21. You fell for me right away.

FRANCIS: Oh- you think so/

HAROLD: Sure, how could you resist these rugged good looks? I was a romantic too/

FRANCIS: Really? That's how you remember it? Where's the nurse's call button?

HAROLD: Why?

FRANCIS: I'm going to ask her if they hit your head when they put you in the ambulance.

HAROLD: Oh no- this old noggin' is a steel trap, my dear. I remember I held the door for you. I offered to buy you popcorn. I was a perfect gentleman.

FRANCIS: Wait- are you talking about *our* first date?

HAROLD: Of course, It was hard to forget.

FRANCIS: I'd say, you took me to see Cool Hand Luke at the drive-in.

HAROLD: Yes, a cinematic masterpiece and very romantic. You're welcome.

FRANCIS: I watched a guy eat 50 eggs as you cheered him on with all the other brutes in their cars.

HAROLD: Hey, Paul Newman- was not just *any* guy.

(Beat)

You know- people use to say I resembled him/

Harold poses and they both laugh.

FRANCIS: Oh Harry. You know what I do remember? *After* the movie/

HAROLD: (Flirty) Ohhhh... When we went back to my parents' place/

FRANCIS: You put on that Irvin Berlin record/

HAROLD: I told you I was romantic.

FRANCIS: We danced cheek-to-cheek like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

HAROLD: (sings off-key in his chair pretending he's dancing) Heaven, I'm in heaven/

FRANCIS: Shhhh- Harold don't ruin the memory with your singing.

HAROLD: Sorry dear.

They share a laugh. He stares at her and smiles lost in memories.

FRANCIS: Harold? Harold. What is it? Are you ok? **(Calls OS)** Nurse!

HAROLD: Frannie. I'm fine. I just realized something- they say you fall in love just once. But that's not true. I fell in love with you that night and now just looking at you... I realize I love you more now than I could've possibly back then.

(Beat)

FRANCIS: You gave me quite a scare/

HAROLD: I know.

FRANCIS: 51 years flashed before my eyes. I felt helpless. Harry, I couldn't think

straight. I wanted to remember everything - every- single- thing but I stood there in shock.

FRANCIS puts her head down tearful.

FRANCIS:(cont) I thought I lost you Harry- I really thought that was it/

HAROLD walks over to Francis as she cries.

HAROLD: *Shhh...shh...*let me help you remember everything you need to.

HAROLD holds out his hand to FRANCIS he starts humming Always by Irving Berlin. FRANCIS looks up and takes his hand. HAROLD pulls her close cheek-to-cheek. This all happens very slowly.

FRANCIS: Be careful. Don't hurt yourself.

HAROLD: A mild cardiac event isn't going to keep me from my special lady.

FRANCIS: You old romantic.

HAROLD. Quiet- mom's upstairs you don't want her to come down.

They dance for a moment then HAROLD very slowly and gently spins FRANCIS.

HAROLD: *(sings)* I'll be loving you always.

We see them dancing cheek to cheek.

-End Play-