

Marvin's Room- Dir. Jerry Zaks , 1996

Estranged since their father's first stroke some 17 years earlier, Lee and Bessie lead separate lives in separate states. Lee's son, Hank, finds himself committed to a mental institution after setting fire to his mother's house. His younger brother, Charlie, seems unfazed by his brother's eccentricities or his mother's seeming disinterest. When Lee comes to the asylum to spring Hank for a week in Florida so that he can be tested as a possible bone marrow donor for Bessie, Hank is incredulous. "I didn't even know you had a sister," he says. "Remember, every Christmas, when I used to say 'Well, looks like Aunt Bessie didn't send us a card again this year?'" "Oh yeah," Hank says. Meanwhile, Marvin, the two women's bedridden father, has "been dying for the past twenty years." "He's doing it real slow so I don't miss anything," Bessie tells Dr. Wally. In Bessie's regular doctor's absence, it has fallen to Dr. Wally to inform Bessie that she has leukemia and will die without a bone marrow transplant. This precipitates the two sisters uneasy reunion. In Marvin's room, Bessie cares for her father's every need. In Lee's eyes, the sacrifice Bessie has made is too great and realizing the old man's welfare will fall to her if Bessie dies, Lee's first instinct is to look for a nursing home. "In a few month's, I'll have my cosmology degree," she says. "My life is just coming together; I'm not going to give it all up, now!" As first Lee is tested and then the boys for the compatibility of their marrow with Bessie's, the women take stock of their lives and rediscover the meaning of "family."

INT. DR. WALLY'S OFFICE - DAY

Hank sits in the waiting room. Bessie enters.

BESSIE

Hank. I thought you'd be at home.

HANK

No, I'm here.

BESSIE

Where's your mom?

HANK

She went over to the mall.

BESSIE

Where's Charlie?

HANK

He's in back already.

BESSIE
Are you here to be with Charlie?

HANK
I'll probably get tested too.

On Bessie, as she reacts to this.

BESSIE
Nervous?

HANK
No.

BESSIE
(looks around nervously)
These offices used to be infested
with bugs.

HANK
Bugs don't bother me.

BESSIE
No?

HANK
They crawl out of the drain in the
boys' shower. They hide in a junk
pile in the auto shop. They float
in the soap basins on the sinks.
You get used to them.

BESSIE
I wouldn't.

HANK
One dude in my room. There's twelve
of us in this room and one dude
catches bugs and puts them on a
leash.

BESSIE
A leash?

HANK
A hair leash. He pulls a strand of
his hair and ties it around the bug
and the other end he tacks down
under his bunk. He had this whole
zoo of bugs walking in little
circles under his bed.

BESSIE
Hank.

HANK

'Til this other dude smashed them all with the back of his cafeteria tray. It was funny.

BESSIE

Why do you make up these stories?

HANK

What?

BESSIE

These stories. Razors under the tongue, hair leashes.

HANK

I'm not making anything up.

BESSIE

Why did you pretend you weren't going to get tested? Why did you put me through that?

Hank walks out of the doctor's office. Bessie sits for a minute, then gets up and follows.

EXT. DR. WALLY'S OFFICE - DAY

Hank leans against the building, sulking. Bessie catches up to him.

HANK

I haven't told you shit. You don't know anything about where they've got me.

BESSIE

Well, you can tell me if you want.

HANK

You don't know.

BESSIE

Then tell me.

Pause.

HANK

You don't know.

BESSIE

I was in the hospital. It was boring. I was scared and it was boring.

HANK

There's this one dude---

BESSIE

Hank, if this is another tall tale. I'm not interested.

Silence.

BESSIE (CONT'D)

I'm going back, in case Charlie is done.