CUE

by Ka e Danley

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SETTING:

The set of a community theatre play

CHARACTERS:

MARY: 30+ An actress playing a woman having a torrid love affair

JOHN: 30+ An actress playing a woman having a torrid love affair

TOM: 30+ A dramatic actor playing a jealous husband

CUE

AT RISE: On the set of a community theatre play. Actors MARY and JOHN are at the high point of a dramatic scene.

MARY:
But John… what if my husband comes home?

JOHN:
I love you, Mary! I'd die for you, Mary!

MARY:
It is IMPOSSIBLE!

JOHN:
Love does not know the word "impossible " The only "impossible" I know is a lifetime without you!

MARY
Kiss me! Kiss me gentle and slow… Make me forget Tom and his jealous, violent ways. Let eternity begin right here… right now…

They slowly move in for a kiss… and move in… and hold… lips lingering inches from each other… and hold… Not moving, they glance out of the corner of their eyes at the wings Mary breaks away.

MARY:
Aaaah…. It's a bit stuffy, don't you think?

JOHN:
Maybe?

MARY:
Maybe I'll open up the window.

She goes to the 4th wall and mimes opening up a window. Beat.

JOHN:
Right. What a bracing autumn day. Feel that breeze!

He pounds on his chest.

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MARY:
You… pounding on your chest like that reminds me of the wild, animalistic passion I feel for you.

JOHN:
And you… opening that window reminds me of… your strong, brawny arms…

MARY:
What?

JOHN:
Which you hold me with. Which you should be holding me with. Come here, my love! My Popeye! Of my heart!

MARY:
Oh, John! John. Jooooohn. But we must be careful (*calling offstage*) BECAUSE MY HUSBAND COULD CATCH US ANY MOMENT!

JOHN:
Do not deny your feelings for me! Your eyes are like two… pools of… eternal… eyeball pools…

MARY:
I can't! We can't! We mustn't! I can't!

JOHN:
Love does not know the word "impossible. The only "impossible" I know is a lifetime without you!

MARY:
Kiss me! Kiss me gentle and slow… Make me forget Tom and his jealous, violent ways. Let eternity begin right here… right now…

They move ever so slowly in for a kiss but hold moments before their lips touch. And then hold. And then hold. John breaks away.

JOHN:
And maybe I should check the coat closet to see if Tom is hiding inside.

He goes over to the wings and mimes opening up a door.

JOHN:
Nope. Not in the coat closet.

Neither is sure what to do.

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MARY:

Thank god.

JOHN:

I know.

MARY:

That would have been terrible. For him to be in the coat closet. And to have burst in on us. When we were about to do the… thing.

JOHN:

Terrible. SO lucky. That's what we are. Lucky, lucky, lucky… THINGS were about to happen. I wonder *why* he *isn't* in the coat closet.

TOM (o.s.)

I'M NOT READY.

Mary and John look at each other uncomfortably

MARY:

Did you say something, John?

JOHN:

No. (*beat)* You?

MARY:

You sure you weren t about to say something?

JOHN:

I was just about to say—

TOM (o.s.)

WHERE THE EFF ARE MY SHOES??? WHO MOVED MY SHOES???

JOHN:

The shoes seem to be missing from the coat closet.

TOM (o.s.)

I CAN'T INHABIT MY CHARACTER WITHOUT THE RIGHT SHOES.

MARY:

IT WOULD BE SO NICE IF MY HUSBAND, TOM, WOULD INHABIT THE COAT CLOSET.

There is the sound of Tom running into a trashcan backstage.

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JOHN:

So.

MARY:

Big mice.

JOHN:

So big.

MARY:

They talk. About shoes. Those mice.

JOHN:

As mice do.

MARY:

Yes. So.

JOHN:

So. We could… order a pizza…?

MARY:

Yes! Let's!

They run over to the table and realizing they have no phone, Mary picks up an imaginary phone, making up the lines as they go along.

MARY:

(*miming pressing the buttons*) Beep boop bop. Yes. Hello. We'll have a pepperoni pizza. Yes, I have a coupon.

John sees that Tom (o.s.) may be ready for his entrance.

JOHN:

Ooo. A sexy pepperoni.

MARY:

A sexy pepperoni?

John jerks his head towards Tom offstage.

JOHN:

You know how pepperoni turns me on, Mary. I can't live without you!

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MARY:
Right. RIGHT! Yes! SEXY PEPPERONI! OH THOSE COUPONS! It would be such a shame for my husband to come bursting out of the closet to discover me ordering sexy pepperoni with another man!

JOHN:
Love does not know the word "impossible." The only "impossible" I know is a lifetime without you!

MARY:
Kiss me! Kiss me gentle and slow… Make me forget Tom and his jealous, violent ways. Let eternity begin right here… right now…

Their mouths move towards each other… closer… and closer… they hold…

TOM: (o.s.)
I FORGOT TO PUT ON MY DANCE BELT

MARY:
Oh, Jesus Christ.

JOHN:
I can't—

MARY:
Dance belt?

John just shrugs.

MARY:
Want a cup of coffee?

JOHN:
Sure.

She space works a cup of coffee.

JOHN:
There are actual cups on the table…

MARY:
SHUT UP.

JOHN:
Right.

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They sit, drinking from their pretend coffee cups, staring off into space. There is another crash.

Tom (o.s.)

GAWDDAMNIT!

JOHN:

I could make balloon animals.

MARY:

Balloon animals?

John does a spacework balloon animal.

JOHN:

It's a dog!

Mary takes it from him and places it on the ground, and pretends to pet the pretend balloon animal.

MARY:

Hi puppy!

JOHN:

It's a balloon animal.

MARY:

Oh! I thought you made a balloon ANIMAL.

JOHN:

It's not alive. It's a balloon.

MARY:

Or maybe it is…?

JOHN:

It's a balloon animal…?

MARY:

(*trying to come up with something to say*)

I could never love a man who sees a balloon animal as just a balloon! I need a man who… can make imaginary life with his hands. Imaginary INVISIBLE life. Can you do that for me, John?

John mimes blowing up a long balloon.

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MARY:
Make it alive! Make it alive as you and me!

JOHN:
It's ALIVE!

MARY:
Are you sure? Or are you just making me another dead balloon animal? Is there more to balloon animals than breath and latex?

JOHN:
What do you know about breath and latex, you who don't even use cups?

He motions to the cups on the table Mary refused to use earlier.

MARY:
Your love has made me mad! Mad I say!

JOHN:
What about… (*John sees that Tom might be ready*) A SEXY balloon animal.

MARY:
What? OH THANK GOD!

JOHN
Mary, the saucy appeal f the balloon creatures I create aside… I never thought I would find happiness again—

MARY:
I thought it was impossible!

JOHN:
Love does not know the word "impossible." The only "impossible" I know is a lifetime without you.

MARY:
Kiss me. Kiss me gentle and slow. Make me forget Tom and his jealous, violent ways. Let eternity begin right here. Right now.

TOM (o.s.)
Are there caps in the gun? Where the hell is our stage manager?

MARY:
Oh, for godssake.

Mary pecks John on the cheek.

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MARY:
Oh look. We kissed. Let's go live happily ever after.

JOHN:
Yes! Let's!

They leave the stage. There is a pause. Tom leaps out.

TOM:
AHAH! I have caught you! Die! Oh… SOMEONE MISSED THEIR CUE!

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LEARNING THE DANCE

By Nancy West

CHARACTERS

Jenna	40s-60s, female, bisexual, hesitant, plain-spoken, a lousy dancer who wants to get better
Debra	40s-60s, female, lesbian, curious, cautious, a good dancer

SETTING

A meeting room at a queer community center
with folding chairs and tables, setup for movie night

TIME

Present day

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NOTES:

I encourage hinking beyond sexual orientation and gender expression stereotypes for hair, makeup, costume, and mannerisms. Debra appearing more masculine-presenting and Jenna appearing more feminine-presenting, for example, could be a valid choice, but consider why the choice is being made.

The play length allows time for the dance sequence, so the dance should be given the time it needs to build slowly in intensity and intimacy.

A forward slash (/): the next speaker interrupts, and the first speaker overlaps/continues.
An em dash (—): the next speaker interrupts, and the first speaker stops talking.
An ellipses (…): a trailing off, where the speaker stops themselves from continuing.

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LIGHTS UP on a meeting room at a queer community center. Folding chairs are waiting to be placed. There's a table with a pile of decorations and snacks waiting to be setup. DEBRA is putting decorations on the wall. She admires her handiwork. Music plays in the background.

JENNA ENTERS, rushing, breathless.

JENNA

Hey, there! I'm supposed to help setup. Sorry I'm late.

DEBRA

No problem. It's movie night, so I don't think we need much We have chairs and the snack table to setup. Maybe a bit more bling on the walls

JENNA

What's the movie?

DEBRA

"The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love."

JENNA

Ah, an oldie but a goodie. *(JENNA begins to s tup)* Weren't we partners at the dance lesson last month?

DEBRA

Yep.

JENNA

Your name is… begins with a D? I'm sorry —

DEBRA

Debra. Nice to meet you. Again.

JENNA

Jenna. I enjoyed it. I made a lot of mistakes.

DEBRA

Oh, me, too.

JENNA

You were a great lead. I still dance like I'm in middle school. Waving my arms all over the place, two left feet.

(JENNA demonstrates, flailing around wildly, which amuses DEBRA)

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DEBRA
Well, you looked like you were having a good time.

JENNA
Oh, I was! I can't seem to move my feet in specific patterns. Yet.

(DEBRA and JENNA continue to work during the following conversation, using hand motions and facial expressions to indicate questions and agree what decorations to put up, how many chairs to setup, which snacks to put out, etc.)

DEBRA
I think we don't need many chairs. We can always put more out later.

JENNA
Got it.

DEBRA
So, I'm kinda new to town. You?

JENNA
I've been here since freshman year of college. But I'm new to the queer meet ups.

DEBRA
Oh?

JENNA
Yeah. I'm bi. Bisexual.

DEBRA
Sure.

JENNA
I'm trying to get out, meet people. I was married. To a man. He passed away a few years ago.

DEBRA
Oh, I'm sorry.

JENNA
Thanks. What about you?

DEBRA
Lesbian. All the live long day. No question. Divorced from my first wife. Well, only wife. So far. Is the bi thing new for you?

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JENNA

No, no it's not new. But my husband has been my only partner. And that was fine. Great, as a matter of fact.

DEBRA

Sounds like he was a keeper.

JENNA

Yes. Yes, he was. It took a long time, but I think I'm ready to date. I felt this…I don't know…

DEBRA

Yearning?

JENNA

Yes. Yearning. That's the perfect word. I heard about this place and walked in not knowing many people. Everyone's been so friend y.

DEBRA

It's a good group. I'm still getting to know folks, too.

JENNA

Where'd you move from?

DEBRA

Chicago. Got a transfer here nine months ago. I'm in logistics. Getting cartons and crates and trucks from one place to another.

JENNA

Well, welcome! I hope you l ke it here. It's a lot smaller than Chicago.

DEBRA

So far, so good. So, your husband, / was he …?

JENNA

I'm sorry, I'm not real comfortable talking about him anymore.

DEBRA

Sure.

JENNA

You know, I was hoping I'd see you tonight.

DEBRA

Really?

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JENNA

Yeah. I enjoyed our dance.

DEBRA

That's nice to hear. / I'm …

JENNA

Sorry, I'm bad at this.

DEBRA

What?

JENNA

Flirting. I'm out of practice. And I can't tell if I'm annoying or confusing, which is / not what I…

DEBRA

You're doing fine. In case it's not obvious, I'm flirting back

JENNA

Okay. Good to know. You're a bit of a charmer. With a real knack for decorating.

(They work in silence for a couple of b ats, very aware of each other)

DEBRA

Hey. Um. You don have to answer. Bu I'm curious if you've ever been serious with a woman before?

JENNA

Not really. I didn't date much in college. I was very serious, very focused. There was some kissing, making out. I had a *lot* of crushes.

DEBRA

So you're a virgin.

JENNA

Um… a virgin?

DEBRA

With women.

JENNA

Well, I guess? I never thought of it … like that.

DEBRA

You're starting over.

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JENNA
Same old me. But you're right, I'm not very experienced…that way…yet.

DEBRA
I wasn't sure what to do when I started dating women, either. It'll get easier.

JENNA
Right, thanks. How long have you been divorced?

DEBRA
About a year. We finalized it before Bobby and I moved.

JENNA
Bobby is your … dog? Cat? Parakeet?

DEBRA
My kid.

JENNA
Oh! You're a mom. Oh, that's great.

DEBRA
Yeah, he's a real firecracker. Being a mom is the best. You have any kids?

JENNA
No, not really we didn't … No.

DEBRA
Ah. Do you like kids?

JENNA
Sure! I'm godmother to Lydia, my best friend's girl. We have sleepovers, and she paints my nails. She likes some wild colors, let me tell you. I have pets, though. Three dogs and two cats.

DEBRA
Wow. That's a lot.

JENNA
Yeah. They're a handful. In a different way, of course. Do you miss being married?

DEBRA
I miss having someone who's my person, you know? Waking up next to her. Knowing the next morning, and the morning after that, she'll still be there.

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JENNA

Yeah.

DEBRA

It's reassuring. But it doesn't always work out that way.

JENNA

True. You miss your ex?

DEBRA

Sometimes. Hey, maybe I should steal this!

(DEBRA holds up a big bow and attaches it to her shirt. JENNA laughs.)

JENNA

You look very festive.

DEBRA

Why, thank you, m'lady. Would you like to dance?

JENNA

Ohhh, I don't think I remember .

DEBRA

I can show you. But we don't have to. No pressure.

JENNA

I'd like o. If you don't mind maybe having your feet stepped on. Again.

(DEBRA holds her hands out in the closed hold position as the lead partner. JENNA steps in until they're about a foot apart, puts a hand on DEBRA's shoulder and takes her outstretched hand. DEBRA puts her other hand on JENNA's waist. They shuffle to get into position.)

DEBRA

Ready?

(JENNA nods. They begin to dance the Waltz Box Step. Slowly at first, as JENNA hesitates at every step. Within a few beats they begin to get the rhythm together).

DEBRA

You're doing great.

JENNA

Oops, I got your foot!

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DEBRA

Don't worry about it.

(The dance is easier, more relaxed now. JENNA gains in confidence.)

DEBRA

Ready to slide your hand down my arm? Then I'll catch it and twirl you in. Remember?

JENNA

Ohh, I don't know, maybe. Uh. Okay, let's try it!

(JENNA slides her hand down DEBRA's arm, and DEBRA tries to catch it and twirl JENNA into her. They miss and their hands separate. DEBRA grabs JENNA's hand again to correct, but instead they end up standing in an awkward position. They separate slightly, laughing.)

DEBRA

Well, that did not go as planned.

JENNA

Sorry, sorry! I'm sure it's my fault!

DEBRA

I'm lead, so it's my fault

JENNA

I'm sure it's not!

(JENNA moves in close to DEBRA, who puts both her hands on JENNA's waist.)

DEBRA

This okay?

JENNA

Yes.

(JENNA slides her arms around DEBRA's neck. They move closer together, swaying back and forth to the music, eyes locked. DEBRA moves her hands on JENNA's back, and JENNA steps in even closer. They dance, then JENNA puts her head on DEBRA's shoulder. They dance for a few beats. Then JENNA pulls away slightly, her arms still around DEBRA's neck.)

JENNA

I want to say … I really enjoy being with you. I haven't felt this comfortable with anyone in a long time.

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(An expectant BEAT, but DEBRA doesn't respond. JENNA slows, then stops, then awkwardly steps out of the embrace.)

Um. I guess we should finish decorating.

DEBRA

Jenna. Look, I'm ... I'd like to ask, would you say that you prefer women now?

JENNA

I'm attracted to a lot of different people. Women, yes, but also guys, anyone, really, all genders. Depending. What exactly are you / asking…?

DEBRA

I want to be honest. I'm not comfortable dating someone who's also dating men.

JENNA

Okay. Um. Thanks for being honest, I guess. But I'm not ready to settle down with one person, anyway.

DEBRA

I understand that. Me either. I'm saying my focus is on dating women who are interested in only being intimate with other women.

JENNA

I'm not sure what to say. I haven't had a lot of chances to be intimate with anyone.

DEBRA

This is about me. I respect your choices. But I have my own lines I don't want to cross.

JENNA

Respect. Okay. What are you worried about?

DEBRA

It's too risky.

JENNA

Risky? It's just a dance! We're not getting married, here.

DEBRA

It's possible that as soon as a man comes into the picture, I'll get dropped.

JENNA

That's ridiculous.

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DEBRA

I've seen it happen. I think — and this is not your fault, I know you may not feel this way now — but for most people, it's easier to go back to what they know. It's comfortable.

JENNA

Well. Thanks for making me feel like Typhoid Mary.

DEBRA

That wasn't my ... I want to be up front with you.

JENNA

Well. Debra. I have a good heart. And integrity. I think we could really end up liking each other. If that happened, and if we agreed on how to be together, I would honor that.

DEBRA

I know you believe that. But people change. I can't wait for the oth r shoe to drop.

JENNA

I was hoping … Okay. Okay. Um. Listen. I think I'm gonna go

(JENNA begins gathering up her things)

DEBRA

Stay for the movie. Please. I shouldn't have asked you to dance, I didn't realize how quickly / we both …

JENNA

Please don't. Don't regret dancing with me.

(JENNA EXITS. DEBRA notices the bow she's still wearing and takes it off.)

BLACKOUT

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playwriting 101, assignment #1

by Meg Schenk
[redacted]

CHARACTERS:

A

B

SETTING:

A stage. A flimsy backdrop of a European café.

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Two chairs are situated in front of a flimsy background of a European café. A is already sitting, smoking a fake cigarette. B enters. A directs a nonchalant nod towards B, which is casually returned. B settles into their seat. A beat.

A
So.
(Pause.)
Did you bring it?

B
Um…… no?

A
No?????

B
Jesus, I mean there's no need to cause a scene.

A
We're already *in* a scene, asshole

B
(Looking around at their surroundings. A pause.)
Shit.

A
(Addressing the audience sarcastically)
Hey, there. Enjoying the program so far?

B
Oh my god, do they— you— you're allowed to do that?

A
(Shrugging)
I can do whatever I want. Except, you know…

B
… Except what?

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A
Nothing. Nevermind. I don't know. You know what, forget it.

B
….Okay…
(Pause.)
Soooo what do we do now then?

A
Well you didn't bring it, so there's nothing we can do.

Pause.

B
Ok. But if I *had* brought it—?

A
If you had brought it, then you would have brought it, wouldn't ya?

B
I'm… sorry?

A
Cigarette?

B
(Shaking off their flusteredness)
Yeah. Why not then.
(They take their time lighting their cigarette, taking a puff, leaning back in their chair.)
Are we allowed to do this on stage?

A
Can you stop asking permission for everything already?

B
Sorry, no, yeah. It's just like— fire hazards and all?

A
They're not real. Did you not notice you're not inhaling anything?

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B
Oh. I guess not.
(Pause.)
So where are we then? Like, setting wise.

A
Psh. Beats me.
(Gesturing towards backdrop.)
Paris? I don't know, somewhere European.

B
Why don't we have accents then?

A stares at B. A pause.

A
Do you *want* me to have an accent?

B
No, no, sorry, I mean— it's fine.
(*A beat. B decides to approach the backdrop to examine it more closely.)*
It's not very well made, is it?

A
Don't look at me, I didn't design this purgatory.

B
What do you think would happen if I just— knocked it over?

A
(Pause, staring at them. A glimmer of mischief.)
Try it.

B pushes the backdrop over. It falls with a thud. It's very anticlimactic.

B
Wow.

A

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I guess we're not in Paris anymore.

B
Cool.

A
So, do you want to get the trying to escape part over with now or what?

B
I— sorry?

A
It's just that now is the time you usually freak out about the fact that we're trapped in here.

B
Usually? Have I met you before?

A
I didn't say that.

Pause

B
Oh.

A
So you want to do that now then?

B
Um. Sure? I guess that makes sense. Have you… tried it before? Escaping, I mean?
(A is silent.)
Yeah okay then… Well, I'm just going to give it a go… I guess I'll just—

B gestures towards offstage. A shrugs ("why not?"). B lightly jogs offstage. A beat. A calmly smokes their nonfunctioning cigarette. B enters from the other side of the stage.

B
Huh. No, that didn't work. Lemme just—

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B takes off again, trying from the other side now. A beat later, they return.

A
See? Pointless.

B
Huh.
(Settling back into their chair, perturbed. A beat.)
Hey, um, can I tell you something?
(A shrugs. B leans towards them.)
I didn't, like— *see* anything back there. It was all black. Like…
(B laughs, trying to disguise their fear)
I don't know, this is gonna sound crazy, but it's like — I didn't even exist offstage?

A
Oh, fuck off.

B
What?? What.

A
Don't tell me this is all a metaphor for the devaluing of the individual in the entertainment industry or some bullshit. Or, or how an artist is only their *true self* when they're in their element and making art or some… *crockery* like that.

B
Crockery?

A
I don't know.

B
Is that even a word?

A
Who cares?
(A sudden shift. A delivers this quickly and automatically)
Hang on one moment, the writer is googling it to see where that came from and they definitely are just now realizing they've never used that word correctly before because it's actually just

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referring to like cutlery? And dishware? And now they're thinking where the hell did they get that from and what word were they trying to use exactly?
(Pause. As if just now realizing the words that came out of their mouth were not of their own volition.)
Woah.

B
What the hell was that?

A
(For the first time, they are starting to feel shaken.)
I— I don't know.

B
It was like.. like you were in a trance or some hing.

A
Yeah.

B
Like someone was speaking thro gh you. Like the *writer* was speaking through you.

A
(A wry laugh)
Nuhhhh uh uh no, *screw* this shit I'm out of here.

B
But I thought you said there wasn't a way?

A
There's gotta be some way.

B
What if we… I mean, I don't know, what if we— …
(A gestures to B like spit it out)
What if we asked the audience?

A
(Immediately and matter of factly)
No, you don't do that.

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B
What do you mean, why not? You talked to them earlier.

A
We just can't.

B
Stop that!

A
Stop what??

B
Why are you talking as if you know things and you've been here before?

A
(Getting increasingly unsettled)
I— I / don't—

B
Have you been here before?

A
I don't think so!

B
So why are you talking like that then?

A
I don't know!! I don't know, alright?? Stop asking me questions, you're making me like— question my entire being.

Pause.

B
Alright, so let's get this straight. You don't know who you are.

A
Yeah, I mean— yeah, I guess.

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B
Or who I am.

A
Correct.

B
And *I* don't know who I am.

A
Uh huh.

B
Or who you are.

A
Yeah.

B
Right then. Glad we figured that out.
(A beat.)
So, if you don't think you can talk to the audience, what if we just ran out of the theater. Like down through the audience, out the door

A
We're not allowed there not unless it's a purposeful interaction with the audience that either serves to create exposition or atmosphere, act as a humorous device, or, like, forward the plot in some way.

B
Besides, we're nearing the end anyway.

They both clap their hands over the mouths and point to each other like "look what we both just did."

A & B
Ohhh—

A

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Okokok let's think.

B
Yes, right, think.

Beat as they both put their thinking faces on and smoke their "cigarettes."

B
(Getting excited)
Waitwaitwaitwait!

A
What?

B
What was it I was supposed to bring??

A
What?

B
"Did you bring it?" you said. You said if we had it, we could- we could, you know, *do* something.

A
(Getting excited too)
Right! Right, yes ok. Yes! This could be it.

A & B
(Both very excited)
So what is it?

A pause.

B
Wait—

A
No…

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B
Nooo nononono, you *asked*, you had an object in mind, you should know it.

A
You were the one who was supposed to bring it, *you* should know!

B
You were here before me!! I entered second, remember?

A
That doesn't— that's not fair.

B
You had the first line!! You established the scene!

A
I don't remember anything before you came on, we established the scene *together*.
(Shift, in the same automatic tone as before)
Ok I know this isn't the time, but the writer *cannot* stop thinking about how crockery is definitely a phrase and they are not crazy, right? Like it's definitely a phrase that people definitely say.
(Snapping out of it)
Fuck! What the fuck!

B
(Pacing nervously)
Noooonono this is not happening this is *not* cool.

A
This fucker trapped us in this scene!!! It's all their fault!
(To the ceiling, as if talking to God)

B
Fuck you!
(To self)
No, fuck you, I'm just trying to write a scene for a playwriting class you little shit!

A & B
Ahhh!!

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A
Ohh my god ohmygod.

B
What. The. Hell.

A
Let's just— stop. Stop talking. For a second.

Beat.

B
I think… it's almost the end. I can *feel* it. Can't you?

A
Yeah. I can.

Beat.

B
What do you think will happen? Will it go dark like when I was offstage? Only… forever?

A
I… don't know.
(*Pause. Quietly an admission)*
I'm scared.

B
(Pause. Looking at A)
Me too.

A
Maybe I'll meet you again.

B
Yeah?

A
In another scene, maybe.

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B
Yeah. Maybe.
(They stuff their hands in their pockets and feel something.)
Wait. Wait a second.

A
What? What is it? Did you bring it? Did you bring it??

B
(Starting to hold what he has in his pocket up, with a burst of excitement)
I brought—

Sudden black out. End of scene

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SEARCH FOR AN ENDING

By Karissa Murrell Myers

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Contact
[redacted]

CHARACTERS
SHAWN - he/him, 30's. A screenwriter.
BENNY - he/him, 30's. A screenwriter.
GINGER - she/her, 30's. A screenwriter.
PAM - she/her, 20's. She's new.

SETTING
A writer's room with video conferencing equipment.

SCENE

A writer's room with video conferencing equipment. SHAWN and BENNY are arguing. GINGER is stirring her coffee irritatedly.

SHAWN
I'm sorry, but it doesn't make any sense!

BENNY
Of course it / does!

SHAWN
Why would Madison leave everything behind when i 's -

BENNY
Why wouldn't she?

SHAWN
If it were me -

BENNY
Well, this isn't ab ut you -

SHAWN
I didn't say it was -

BENNY
She's a free woman / with free will -

SHAWN
You always / try to turn it around on me -

BENNY
And if she really, and I mean, *really* wants to change her life, then of course she has to leave! And isn't the story we're trying to convey here? How if you're a badass bitch, a feminist fertility corporate goddess, sometimes you have to get radical when it comes to changing your own life!

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SHAWN
Is that the story we're trying to convey, though?

BENNY
Oh my god, you cannot / be serious -

SHAWN
I thought this was a story about a strong woman being able to get exactly what she wants and the empowerment that comes from being able to pull herself up by her own bootstraps!

BENNY
That's exactly what this ending does!

GINGER
Guys -

SHAWN
Just listen listen listen listen, okay?
Let's say she does -

BENNY
She has to!

SHAWN
Okay, let's say she does. But then she's spent the entire movie, like the whole time just talk, talk, talking about how she's gotta fight to have it all - the boss babe career, the kids, the social media clout -

BENNY
And the Devil Wears Prada wardrobe, don't / forget the -

SHAWN
Right right right -
So if she just leaves it all behind in the end, it completely undercuts the entire story -

BENNY
No, it doesn't -

GINGER
Guys -

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SHAWN
How doesn't it? Because I read this ending you've concocted / and I feel like I'm in a 1950's -

BENNY
Concocted?! You are *such* a drama queen!

SHAWN
I'm the drama queen? Um okay -

BENNY
And I can't believe we're having this argument now when they want the draft by end of day -

GINGER
Guys!

BENNY
Huh? Oh my god, is that the time?

SHAWN
Wow, lunchtime already! Do you wanna -

BENNY
Oh yeah, I'm hungry.

SHAWN
Ginger, you're hungry, right?

GINGER
I mean, yeah, but -

SHAWN
Let's get those orders in. Who do we -

BENNY
Oh that's right. Ginger, do you know who we're supposed to give these to now? I wasn't paying attention when what's-her-name -

GINGER
You mean Pam?

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SHAWN
Pam? Is her name Pam?

BENNY
I'm pretty positive she said it was Sam.

SHAWN
No, it's Cam.

BENNY
Cam? Are girls named Cam?

SHAWN
Like Cameron Diaz?

BENNY
Oh! Hot.

GINGER
Her name is Pam.

SHAWN
Are you sure?

GINGER
Yes.

BENNY
Okay, well, we trust you.
So glad you can keep track of all that shit for us.

SHAWN
That's why we really need you at the table with us.

BENNY
We're kind of bad at remembering stuff so it's suuuuper helpful that you're here.

SHAWN
Yeah, we're really glad you can keep us on task.

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BENNY
Keep our noses to the grindstone.

SHAWN
Exactly! And this is way better than having to fetch shit and run errands for cranky writers and stuff, I'll bet. You get to be the cranky writer now!

BENNY
Do you guys know what you want?

SHAWN
Regular for me.

BENNY
Yep. Ginger?

GINGER
Oh, um - turkey for me, I guess?
And a Diet.

BENNY starts banging away on the video conferencing telecom system.

BENNY
How do you work this stupid -

GINGER
Oh my god, here.

GINGER takes over and presses a button, PAM comes on the screen.

PAM
Hi, hi everyone! Can I help you with something?

BENNY
We need lunch, Sam.

GINGER
Pam.

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BENNY
Pam! Pam, we need lunch. We're starving. Our brain cells just aren't working right without sustenance. And Shawn here is almost prediabetic so if he doesn't get any food in him, he shakes and convulses and is bad at his job.

SHAWN
I'm always bad at my job.

BENNY
That's true! He doesn't know how to write a resolution to save his life.

PAM
Oh!

BENNY
Okay, so for lunch, we need a turkey with a Diet. Actually, just make that two, make it easier on ya - and then Shawn's regular.

PAM
Okay, um…I'm sorry, I don't know what Shawn's regular is.

SHAWN
Oh! What is my regular?

BENNY
You don't know what your regular is?

SHAWN
I just say, "the regular" and then Ginger always orders it. Ordered it.

They all look at GINGER.

GINGER
Shawn takes a sprout and avocado spinach wrap, with a cherry kombucha.

SHAWN
Is that what my regular is?

GINGER
Yes.

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SHAWN
Oh god, it's kind of gross, isn't it?

PAM
Do you want something else?

SHAWN
No, no, if that's what I get, then that's what I get!

BENNY
(to SHAWN) You're an idiot.
Thanks Sam.

PAM
Okay, um, it's Pam -

BENNY turns the video conferencing off.

BENNY
Okay, I'm gonna take a leak.

BENNY exits. SHAWN starts texting.

GINGER
Hey Shawn? I had an idea about the resolution.

SHAWN
Huh, what?

GINGER
The story resolution. Madison's ending. I had / an idea -

SHAWN
Oh! Um, okay.

GINGER
I was just thinking about what Madison really wants.

SHAWN
Uh-huh.

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GINGER
Like, not what she says she wants, but what she actually truly wants.

SHAWN
Uh-huh.

GINGER
And what I think she just wants is some respect.

SHAWN
Respect?

GINGER
Yeah.

SHAWN
Mmm, okay? I mean, I disagree but you're the woman here so I totally get that you've got the life experience on this so tell me more about what you're -

GINGER
Well -

SHAWN
Oh shit, do you mean like, self-respect?

GINGER
No -

SHAWN
Because she's gotta hella lotta self-respect, doesn't she? I mean, that's exhibited pretty well through the whole rest of the film, isn't it? Or wait - do you feel like that's not clear enough?

GINGER
I mean, I -

SHAWN
Because if it's not clear enough, that's totally Benny's fault. He talks a big "I'm a big bad feminist" game, blah blah blah, even wears that funny little feminist pin on his blazer, but like hello? Who is he kidding, am I right? He's a total closet misogynist.

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BENNY enters.

BENNY
Who's a closet misogynist?

SHAWN
Ginger doesn't think Madison has self-respect.

BENNY
What?

GINGER
I didn't say that -

SHAWN
Which is why she can't leave before she's finished what she started What kind of self-respecting boss babe would do that? I mean come on

BENNY
She leaves because she has self-respect! That's the whole / point!

GINGER
Oh my god -

SHAWN
Well, *she* doesn t agree.

BENNY
Ginger, I know you're new here and everything but I thought that it was pretty obvious -

GINGER
Oh my fucking god, will you two please just shut up?! You know, I was really excited to start working here and when I got assigned to this film, I was like, this is just what I've been waiting for. No more fetching your stupid lunch orders or picking up your dry cleaning or buying your wives AND mistresses gifts for the holidays, but finally - this was a real seat at the table. Or so I fucking thought. But we've been working on this script for three weeks now and neither of you two have asked me my opinion once about the female lead of this film or story construction or hell, really anything at all, which is just wild to me because out of everyone here, I am the only one with functioning nipples and a lifetime of experience being a woman in this world. But you know what? That's fine. That's totally fine. I don't need this shit in my life and so while I thank

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you from bottom of my broken little heart for the opportunity, I thank you even more for the real life insight into what the next thirty years of my life could have been like if I stayed any longer in the hellhole that is this industry. I'm glad I found out now instead of when I was old. So bye. And fuck you.

GINGER grabs her shit and leaves.

Beat.

BENNY
Wow.

SHAWN
That was so good.

BENNY
Right? Can you write that down?

SHAWN
Dude, I fucking recorded it as soon as she said the first "fuck".

BENNY
Awesome. We'll need to tweak it some -

SHAWN
Like a lot -

BENNY
Right, but I think we can use most of it for Madison's ending monologue.

SHAWN
Also, you're right. She needs to leave at the end.

BENNY
I told you. Come on, we need to get this draft to them by the end of the day.

END OF PLAY

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Syzygy

A Play

By Rachael Carnes

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CHARACTERS

MATT

LARRY

(Can be played by any two men.)

SETTING
Deep in a hole

TIME
Really hard to tell anymore.

n. **syz·y·gy**
The configuration of the sun, the moon, and Earth lying in a straight line.
[Late Latin sȳzygia, from Greek suzugiā, *union*, from suzugos, *paired* : sun-, su-, *syn-* + zugon, *yoke*.]

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A sliver of light pierces a dark mine shaft.

MATT and LARRY sit at the bottom, cold, hungry.

MATT
I'm sitting in the airport and I'm listening for the boarding announcement and I just tune out, y'know? I didn't sleep the night before. No one sleeps well the night before —

LARRY
Slept.

MATT
You get that panic.

LARRY
Got.

MATT
The what if I don't wake up on time? What if my car doesn't show? What if he can't find me?

LARRY
Why do you assume he's a he?

MATT
The drivers are always men.

LARRY
Were. Not a e — Were. And that's not true. I had a lady driver once.

MATT
I think they like to be called women.

LARRY
Liked.

MATT
We are getting out of here.

LARRY
We are never going to see a woman or pet a golden retriever or eat a donut ever again.

MATT
I'm sitting in the airport and I'm tired and tuning out the announcements guy.

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LARRY
They were called gate attendants.

MATT
They are called gate attendants, Larry.

LARRY
I used to love airports.

MATT
Is your blood sugar low? Do you need a granola bar? They threw us some this morning. Here.

LARRY
I don't like the peanut butter ones.

MATT
That's all we have.

LARRY
I can't remember what morning is.

MATT
The announcement guy's got this deep voice, sounds like gravel —
He gets on the microphone and he says, "Ladies and gerhnuffah obaboogie."

LARRY
I still feel like I get a coffee headache at the same time and then it passes. That must be morning.

MATT
I can't understand him. So I get focused on my work: I'm composing brilliant work emails!

LARRY
If they can send down granola bars, why can't they send down coffee?

MATT
"Dear Sir, as per my memo —"

LARRY
Hello up there? I want a dry cappuccino!

MATT
I'm surfing, I'm tweeting, I'm on the gram. I'm enjoying a yogurt parfait.

LARRY
Yogurt parfaits were the best part of air travel.

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MATT

And I look up: The gate's nearly empty. I run over. I say, "Are you boarding the flight to —" the gate agent looks at me and says, "We boarded." Who misses a flight by just sitting there?

LARRY

If there's one thing they're doing right up there it's keeping the granola separate from the yogurt.

MATT

But the door is still open. The man at the gate — He's unintelligible but nice.

LARRY

Saints and battleaxes!

MATT

He says, "Last name?" There's hope in that. He clicks the buttons on his magic computer and voila: GO GET YOUR STUFF. He's gonna leave the door open. For me! The guy's there, but —

LARRY

What guy?

MATT

Neon vest, ear things. They protect? He had big boots on. Looked cold.

LARRY

Those guys get glowing orange wands. Or got them. That must have felt good.

MATT

I get my stuff! All of it. I leave my plastic yogurt parfait container — Right on the floor!
And I walk down the jet way, run, really. The ear thing guy says, "I haven't had lunch."
No lunch — He says, "I won't get a lunch 'til 8 o'clock," and slams the jetway door behind us.

LARRY

It's not your fault he didn't get a break.

MATT

What kind of a loser can't even get on a plane? I'm the last one on, and I roll in, pretending I've been in a hurry, like I just made my connection, but the guy in the seat next to mine recognizes me from the terminal. The guy who'd been sitting next to me, eating his egg sandwich and crinkling his yellow egg sandwich paper and pushing his straw in and out of his soda for no apparent reason says, "Hey." We have a *moment.* He knows. He knows I was just sitting there.

LARRY

Hello up there? Any news?

MATT

I put my stuff in the overhead compartment and I settle in and the stewardess —

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LARRY
Flight attendant. They liked to be called flight attendants.

MATT
But she was a woman.

LARRY
Women liked to be called flight attendants! HELLO UP THERE! How's that rope coming?

MATT
Well — The "flight attendant" comes up and says, "I'm so sorry, your seat doesn't go back."

LARRY
Technology!

MATT
I didn't care. It was a short flight. An hour, maybe right over the snowy mountains — But

LARRY
Your seat wouldn't go back.

MATT
Then Egg Sandwich says, "We've sat on the tarmac for an hour while they tried to fix your seat."

LARRY
Huh.

MATT
Don't you get it?

LARRY
I like how they used to casually mention that I could use my seat cushion as a flotation device.

MATT
You're not listening! That seat was *my* seat.

LARRY
And this is a hole and that is the sky and this is me and that is you. What is your point?

MATT
My seat was broken, and that delayed the plane and that meant I got on even though —

LARRY
Things used to happen, Matt. Don't get all spongy!

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MATT
Walking onto that plane with the broken seat made me realize —

LARRY
You're coming apart again, aren't you?

MATT
It *feels* like morning.

LARRY
Please don't.

MATT
I need an alternative!

LARRY
HELLO? We don't need moisturizer samples We need oxygen!

MATT
They can't hear you. They only listen once a day. It's not listening time.

LARRY
They threw us down some hard-boiled sweets. Here.

MATT
Candy! Just call it candy. Hard candy. They gave us peppermint and cinnamon and —

LARRY
I'll call it candy if you call them women! Suck on this and tell me you hear me!

MATT
I don't want butterscotch — I am having an epiphany!

LARRY
The whole world is with you! There are people praying for you to sweet Jesus in heaven and —

MATT
God is an unintelligible but benevolent gate agent!

LARRY
That's not important.

MATT
I never saw it before but then when I did it was like blowing a dandelion. Whoosh!

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LARRY

Whoosh?

MATT

I felt pretty bad about our predicament but then I decided —

LARRY

I don't want to do this anymore.

MATT

You give me those —

LARRY

They gave us to these in case things got — *You know*.

MATT

We don't need these! We've got each other! Let's try humming.

LARRY

We hummed yesterday. I think it was yesterday? It didn't help.

MATT

Let's make a list of Mammals and their Extinct Relatives. Come on. Stay focused!

LARRY

HELLO UP THERE! I an't do this!

MATT

Hands-down, the largest terrestrial mammal that ever lived was —

LARRY

Nope.

MATT

Look at your feet.

LARRY

It's too dark.

MATT

Suck on this peppermint and look at your feet. Better? Minty, right?

LARRY

But giant sloths —

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MATT
Good, Larry. Back from the ledge. Keep breathing.

LARRY
You'd probably imagine that the great beast used its large claws for climbing trees —

MATT
Do you want a back rub?

LARRY
But when you saw its fossil, you'd quickly change your hypothesis!

MATT
You're so tight!

LARRY
A volcanic bridge connected the continents — Animals going north and south. Who knows why!

MATT
These shoulders are in knots.

LARRY
Now we know that the giant sloth supported a subterranean lifestyle.

MATT
That sounds nice.

LARRY
With claws used to dig tunnels — HELLO! My friend and I are just going to dig our way out!

MATT
That's enough paleontology time. Let's talk about craft ideas for the Holidays.

LARRY
I can't explain Turkey Hands again.

MATT
LARRY! Look over here! I'll put my hand on the tunnel. Doesn't that look like a turkey?

LARRY
Adios!

MATT
I don't have anything left. We have some pencil erasers and a few packs of gum. That's it!

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LARRY
How long did they think this would take?

MATT
They have big numbers guys going on this — Working big round numbers!

LARRY
HELLO? How are those numbers coming?

MATT
So, I go right down the jet way —
I should have missed that plane.
Only me, God and the ear thing guy know my secret.
And now you, Larry. Now you know, too.

LARRY
They told us we need those —

MATT
What?

LARRY
Secrets. Common bonds. And paper clips.

MATT
Do you think that plane s can talk to each other?

LARRY
Soothing tones In, out. *Relax*. Matt, you try it with me.

MATT
My breath has butterflies in it.

LARRY
You can sit or you can stand. The rest is up to you.

MATT
I got on the plane and I get to the airport and she's waiting and I'm tired —

LARRY
You hadn't slept well.

MATT
I kiss her. She feels good. Smaller? Can people shrink when you're away?

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LARRY

I think they used to.

MATT

I smell her shampoo, feel her body on mine. We wait at baggage. It takes forever.

LARRY

Time used to stand still in baggage claim.

MATT

I hadn't slept well, but I offer to drive. It's late. A dark, foggy night, and I don't see the truck and — And I come to and she — I should have missed that flight. If I'd missed that flight then —

LARRY

It's okay.

MATT

It's my fault.

LARRY

You didn't know.

MATT

I look over and her eyes are open. She's still here and —

LARRY

They spent 45 minu es on the tarmac.

MATT

She looks at me. Blood down her face, soaked to her feet, still held safe by the belt and —

LARRY

There was nothing you could do!

MATT

I look in her eyes and I see the earth pass through the moon.
And then she was gone.

LARRY

The plane had mechanical failure!

MATT

They waited for me. Why?

LARRY

How could you change the —

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MATT

The tides rise and fall, the sun and the moon at right angles — And her side of the bed, empty.

LARRY

We're just forces counteracting each other.

MATT

But how am I supposed to measure today? By the thinness of my shell?

LARRY

HELLO UP THERE! Where is that rope?

MATT

The poet says: Devastation, which put pains thousandfold —
hurls in their multitudes to the house of strong souls
of heroes, but gives their bodies to be the delicate fea ting
of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus is accomplished —

Lights shift — Bright, fluorescent
We're in an airport.

MATT and LARRY don't know each other.
They're just two travelers, reading, working.

Maybe someone's eating a yogurt parfait.
(Truly the best part of air travel.)

A voiceover:

GATE AGENT

Ladies and gerhnuffah ob boogie.

LARRY

Can you understand that guy?

MATT

No. You?

LARRY

Where you headed?

MATT

Home.

Lights out. End of play.

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THE BENCH

By Romney Humphrey

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Do Not Print

[redacted]

The Bench

CHARACTERS

CAROL, F	20-40
TED, M	20 40
PARK WORKER	any age

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THE BENCH

TED is sitting on a bench. In the exact middle. He feeds squirrels, waves at passersby, yells to friends in the distance. CAROL approaches.

CAROL
Hello.

TED
Hi.

Beat.

CAROL
Would you mind moving?

TED
(Pointing) I would, actually. There's a perfectly good bench over there that's empty.

CAROL
Yes, but I'd like to sit on *this* bench.

TED
Well, this is pretty much *my* bench.

Carol walks over, stands in front of Ted.

CAROL
If you move about six inches, you'll see a plaque.

TED
Oh, I've seen it.

CAROL
The name on the plaque is Lowell Garrett. That was my dad.

TED
Your dad. Oh. Your dead dad. Uh. Sorry.

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CAROL
That's right, My dead dad. I paid $5,000 for that plaque when he died. And on his birthday, I come to this bench and sit. With no one else on the bench. So I'm asking *you* to move to that other empty bench, and give me my space and time with my dad.

TED
Look. I come here every day and use this specific bench for two hours. And those two hours are very important to me. I'm sorry your dad is dead and all but -

CAROL
You '*use*' the bench? For what?

TED
It's private.

CAROL
What are you using my dad's bench for? I r ally can't imagine.

TED
Let's just say it's important.

CAROL
More important than communing with the most wonderful father in the world?

TED
Important in a different way.

Carol comes and sits on the bench. Ted moves down to put space between them.

TED
Could you please just come back later? You can have the whole bench in an hour and a half.

CAROL
Lowell Garrett died five years ago, on his birthday, at 2 p.m. And 2 p.m. is when I sit on this bench by myself. Not the bench that *looks* at this bench, but *this bench*. At this time. So, whatever it is that you do here - yell at people across the park, or whatever -

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TED
I talk to my friends. Not 'people'. Friends that I met while I sat here on this bench. And I feed the squirrels. They count on me.

CAROL
That's what your important work is? Shout outs to your 'friends' and squirrel feeding? *(Beat)* Is *your* father alive?

TED
Well, yes, in a way.

CAROL
Dead, or not dead?

TED
Technically, physically, he's not dead. Emotionally, he's dead to me.

CAROL
But you have a father.

TED
Technically -

AROL
And he's NOT DEAD! So, please, may I have my bench. Surely, you understand why.

TED
But this is the bench that -

He falters.

CAROL
That?

TED
(Sighs) This is the bench that healed me.

CAROL
From your technically not-dead father?

TED
From a really bad year.

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CAROL
As bad as a year where you watched your vibrant, brilliant, funny, father waste away, then vanish? Was it a year like that?

TED
Kind of.

CAROL
Impress me. Tell me what a *really* bad year is.

TED
Well. First my boyfriend broke up with me.

CAROL
So, your boyfriend broke up with you. I've had hundreds of guys break up with me and I'm perfectly fine.

TED
Hundreds?

CAROL
I'm not what you'd call a relationship champion. Please, continue.

ED
Then my dog died.

CAROL
Oh my God. You're like a comic strip.

TED
I'd had that dog my whole life.

CAROL
Yeah, I had my father my whole life too.

TED
Then I developed carpal tunnel syndrome which caused me to lose my job.

CAROL
You look able bodied to me. I'm sure you can find something else.

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TED
I'm a hair stylist. For twenty years.

CAROL
There are options. You have options. Squirrel manager at a zoo, or something.

Beat.

So, that's the extent of your hard year?

TED
Oh, no. Not at all. After I lost my job and Bozo -

CAROL
(Sotto) Of course, 'Bozo'.

TED
I became agoraphobic and had severe anxiety attacks - so severe that I couldn't eat or talk to anyone. All my friends gave up on me. Then my apartment had a horrible mold problem and -

CAROL
Enough! So, you had a *slightly* bad year. You didn't lose your best - *(stops)* you're out here now so *something* had to have changed.

TED
Oh, it did The bench changed everything.

CAROL
This bench? My f ther s bench cured you of agoraphobia?

TED
Basically. I live over there *(points)* and I'd stare out the window all day and night and the main thing I'd see is this bench. And my therapist -

CAROL
You went out to see a therapist. Couldn't have been that bad.

TED
She was a phone therapist. I mean, she allowed me to have sessions on the phone.

CAROL
Get to the bench.

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TED
She - Dr. Taylor - she just kept encouraging me to go to the bench. I didn't have to go anywhere else, but just go to the bench and sit.

CAROL
Sounds revolutionary. What a doctor.

TED
It *was* for me. It took me two months to get to my front door and just *look* at the bench. And another two to make it over to *touch* the bench. Then one day, I just sat down. For a minute. But now, after all this time, I sit here for two hours every day.

CAROL
Yes, but you could sit on *any* bench for that period of time. You'd still be out of your apartment.

TED
Oh, no. I couldn't. Maybe someday, bu right now, *this* is my bench. People know me now They say hello. The squirrels -

CAROL
Look. I'm sorry for your bad year, but your story doesn't change anything for me. In fact, if I hadn't paid for this bench and the plaque, you'd still be stuck in your apartment, so I am actually responsible for your - uh - sanity. Relatively. You may thank me by just for today, sitting elsewhere.

A PARK WORKER stops by the bench, starts measuring. Walks around the pair. Writes the measurements down, etc. speaks into an earphone.

PARK WORKER
(To earphone) This one was never fully cemented in, so we could probably move her today. I'll get my tools out and start. Bring the truck around. Shouldn't take more than an hour.

CAROL
Excuse me. What is it you're doing?

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PARK WORKER
Moving the bench.

CAROL/TED
No you're not. You can't move my bench!

TED
This bench belongs *here*. It's always been here.

PARK WORKER
Well, not anymore. The new sports court is going in this spot in a month and all these benches need to be cleared out.

CAROL
I paid $5,000 for this bench. I certainly have a say about where it lives.

PARK WORKER
Contact the Parks office and they'll give y u a list of where it can be moved. You don't lose your bench - you just have it in a different area. Your bench will be safe.

TED
But this bench has to stay in this spot. I couldn't see it if it moved.

CAROL
And this is where my dad and I -

PARK WORKER
Sorry Sir, and Ma'am This has been in the works for a long time. All the n tifications in the neighborhood have been posted for months.

TED
But I - if you take this bench away, I'll -

CAROL
Where exactly are my options for moving it?

PARK WORKER
Well, there's a stretch down by the river that they've cleared. That's where I'd want it if it were my bench.

TED
The river. But that's -

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PARK WORKER
Around the corner and down the hill. Hop, skip and a jump, as we used to tell the kids.

CAROL
Where else?

PARK WORKER
There's an area by the dog park.

TED
The dog park? Where I used to take Bozo?

PARK WORKER
I couldn't say.

CAROL
The river. Definitely the river. Dad and I used to kayak there all the time. Not that I won't protest this move, but for the time being, I could sit with Dad by the river. Yeah, he'd like that.

TED
(Folding into himself) (softly) I can't make it to the river. I just can't

CAROL
Well, I guess that solves our conundrum.

Ted puts his head in his hands.

CAROL, CONT.
(Softening) I'm sure there are great benches by the dog park. Where you took Bozo. That would be nice. Like me visiting my dad. Except it's - Bozo.

TED
But it isn't *this particular* bench.

PARK WORKER
Sorry folks, I'm going to have to ask you to vacate the area. Equipment coming. Notify the department if you have a preference. They'll all be sitting in a warehouse for a few days until we get organized.

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CAROL
Can't you just wait till the end of the day? It's his -

TED
Or at least another hour and a half left.

PARK WORKER
Just doing my job. And there's a timeline - lot of benches to move. The main thing is, you'll still have your bench. Just in a different place. Maybe a better place, right?

He speaks on the walkie talkie.

(walking away) Where are you guys?

He exits.

TED
Do you want to know what Dr. Taylor would say about this situation?

CAROL
No.

ED
She'd say, "find something to be happy about. The smallest thing is OK. Just - *(he laughs)* she always says, "when things get rough, just look up."

Carol stops. Puts her hand to her heart.

CAROL

That's what my dad always said! "Look up." Exactly that phrase. Whenever I'd get all - well - whatever, he'd just smile and point and say, "Look up." How strange.

The Park Worker returns.

PARK WORKER

Clear the area now. Equipment on its way.

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CAROL

(To Worker) One minute. *(to Ted)* Let's just take a moment. *(Points to the bench nearby)* Ponder our options. The river isn't all that far. I could, like, meet you, and walk you over. If my dad were here, he'd want me to do that.

TED

But even if you did, we'd have to share the bench. And we don't like sharing.

CAROL

No, we don't.

PARK WORKER

One minute for you two lovebirds to figure it out. Where is that guy?

He exits.

Long beat.

They both look up.

CURTAIN

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The Suitcase

By Holly Arsenault

h[redacted]
2[redacted]

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CHARACTERS

MARNIE, late 30s/early 40s, the eldest sister
RORY, the middle sister, mid/late 30s
JESSE, the late-in-life baby brother, 18 or 19 or 20

SETTING

The siblings' childhood home, the suburbs.

MARNIE enters her childhood home. She stops. She looks around. She almost cries but decides not to. JESSE, her younger brother, enters from the kitchen.

MARNIE

Oh my God! Come here. Come here come here home here. I need to touch your face.

JESSE approaches.

MARNIE

Look at you! You have like, you have cheeks and look at this legs, and turn around you have a back. Dimenson! You have dimenson.

JESSE

Hey, Marnie.

MARNIE

Hey, Marnie? I haven't seen you outside of a Zoom screen for three years. THREE YEARS! Hug me, you psychopath!

They hug.

MARNIE

How was the flight?

JESSE

Uh. I don't remember.

MARNIE

Ooh, let me just *(she squeezes his cheeks maniacally)*.

JESSE

I'm real.

MARNIE hugs him fiercely. RORY enters from upstairs. She sees them before they notice her.

RORY

Hi.

MARNIE and JESSE exit their embrace.

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MARNIE

Oh my God hi.

RORY

Hi.

MARNIE

Rore. Oh my God.

JESSE

Rory thank you.

MARNIE

Yes, oh my God. Thank you.

JESSE

Thank you.

MARNIE

Thank you for taking such good care of him.

JESSE

I'm so sorry we couldn't b here.

MARNIE

I'm so sorry you had to deal with all on your own.

JESSE

You are amazing.

MARNIE

But you are so good at that kind of thing.

JESSE

Right.

MARNIE

Bring it in.

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They all go in to a group hug. MARNIE and JESSE start to cry. RORY, who is not crying, kind of shimmies downward out of the group and steps to one side.

JESSE

Oh, this is really normal. When someone has been a primary caregiver for a loved one who is dying, it's like completely normal and usual for them to have a hard time engaging their grief in the immediate aftermath of the death.

He crossed to RORY and holds her upper arm.

JESSE

It's okay to feel.

RORY

So, you finished Psych 101 then.

JESSE

Classic displacement.

MARNIE

Rory. Where is the body? Has he already been moved to the funeral home? Where are you with the arrangements? I am here. I'm here. You don't have to handle it all on your own anymore. You are so strong. What's the name of the funeral home? Is there vodka?

JESSE

I can't believe Dad's gone

MARNIE

I know. I thought he would live forever. Rory, I know that dad wanted to be buried next to mom, but I was just reading about this service where they'll turn you into a diamond, and I really think we should consider it. *(She gazes at her hand, picturing the stone there.)* Is that what you're wearing, by the way? Everybody will be here soon.

RORY

Everybody who?

MARNIE

Just, y'know…Dad's old friends from DDL, Aunt Margene and Uncle Pal, high school people—

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RORY

Oh no. No. No no no no.

RORY starts to pace around a little maniacally.

MARNIE

(To RORY) You shouldn't go through this alone! You need people.

JESSE

I thought he would see me graduate from college.

MARNIE

Well, lucky you to even be in that position. Some of us have a family to raise. We can't afford to spend our time reading FOUCAULT and IBSEN and discussing the MEANING OF THINGS with a bunch of bespectacled academics.

JESSE

It's not my fault that you didn't finish college.

MARNIE

Oh? Whose fault is it then?

JESSE and RORY

Phil's.

MARNIE

Is there vodka? Wait, Jess is this your suitcase?

MARNIE crossed to a blue suitcase that is sitting in the middle of the floor and begins to reach for it. RORY leaves the floor, flinging her body across the room and tackling MARNIE before she can touch the suitcase. They wind up in a pile on the floor.

MARNIE

What in the living hell?

RORY

I'm sorry. I. Are you hurt? I'm sorry. I have to tell you something.

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JESSE helps them both up.

JESSE

What?

RORY

I don't— This is— It's hard to—

JESSE & MARNIE

WHAT?

RORY

Dad's not dead.

JESSE & MARNIE

What?

RORY

Dad is not dead.

MARNIE *(looking around)*

Then where is he?

JESSE

I flew all the way from Japan.

RORY

I know. I'm sorry. I didn't know what else to. Dad is. He's here. He made himself tiny and he is—uh. He is living in this suitcase.

She points to the blue suitcase on the floor. There is a long pause.

JESSE

What?

MARNIE goes to RORY and holds her face.

MARNIE

Rory. Rory Rory Rory. I'm here. It's okay. Can you hear me? Can you hear me Rory? It's Marnie.

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JESSE

What are you doing?

MARNIE

She's obviously experiencing some kind of break. I am helping.

MARNIE starts shaking RORY, gently at first.

MARNIE

RORY. Rory I'm here! Snap out of it. Dad is dead. *(Now shaking her quite violently.)* DAD. IS. DEAD.

RORY breaks free of MARNIE, goes to the suitcase, and opens it. It is facing upstage so the audience does not see what's inside.

RORY

Look.

MARNIE and JESSE approach the suitcase cautiously, each making a wide arc around the object, as if to keep their distance, but eventually ending up standing side-by-side with RORY looking down into it.

RORY

He's sleeping.

MARNIE

What the—

They all crouch down slowly to get a better look at the interior of the suitcase.

JESSE

I don't even understand what I'm looking at.

RORY

Well, it's Dad. And he's alive. But he's tiny. And he's living inside of this suitcase.

MARNIE grabs JESSE by the arm and drags him over to the corner of the room.

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MARNIE

(In a fierce whisper) Okay, Mr. Psych 102—

JESSE

It was 101!

MARNIE

—what do we do about this, huh? Our sister has created a tiny sculpture of our father and stuck it in an extremely detailed diorama of our house and she thinks that is actual Dad and I don't… this isn't… WHERE IS THE VODKA?

RORY has taken out a piece of paper. She starts to read aloud.

RORY

Dear children. Over the past three years, all of our worlds became small. For some, this was a tragedy, but for me, it was a deliverance I never enjoyed being out there. Your mother made it possible for me, but since she's gone now I no longer see any reason to pretend. Everything I want in life is here, in this suitcase I have spent the two years since your mother passed making it so, and now I am finally ready to take the final step. Once I undergo the procedure, my voice will become inaudible to the human ear, so these will be my last words to you. You are all good kids. Please live the lives you want But Marnie, you should really divorce Phil. Love, Dad.

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A moment of quiet. All three of them return to the open suitcase and stare down into it. Unable to resist, MARNIE reaches in and pokes their sleeping, tiny father. He stirs. They all startle.

MARNIE

Oh my Gosh he's alive.

RORY

I told you.

MARNIE

Two years, he said. Two years he's been planning this. Since Mom died, he said. Rory, how could you not know???

RORY

Well, you know. Dad always built little dioramas. He was always tinkering. I knew he was making this miniature replica of our home in a suitcase, of course I knew, but I didn't think anything of it. I did not, for example, realize that he planned to make himself tiny and live out the rest of his life in it.

JESSE has crouched down and is inspecting the exterior of the suitcase.

JESSE

It has air holes.

MARNIE

Well this is… this is a… this is a problem. This is a big problem, Rore

RORY

No kidding, Marne.

MARNIE

What are you going to do?

RORY

What am *I* going to do? Why is it my respons bility to solve this problem?

MARNIE

You're the one who allowed our father to shrink himself tiny and move into this suitcase!

RORY

He didn't ask for my permission!

MARNIE

Well, you have to fix it!

RORY

If I knew how to fix it I would not have called YOU.

JESSE

SHUT UP!!! Shut up. Shut up. You'll wake him.

RORY and MARNIE both gawk at JESSE.

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RORY

That is your concern?

MARNIE

That we might wake him?

JESSE

This is what Dad wanted. We have to respect that.

RORY

That's fine, but what do we tell everybody? Dad can't just have disappeared all the sudden.

MARNIE

(Gasp) People will think that we killed him!

JESSE

What? No they won't.

MARNIE

Oh, you are so naïve.

RORY

(Dawning realization) Old man living alone suddenly disappears and there's no body…

MARNIE

They'll say we dumped him in th lake!

JESSE

What lake?

MARNIE

They'll say we dismembered him and fed his parts to the jackals.

JESSE

What jackals? This is the suburbs!

MARNIE

I can't go to prison!

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JESSE

Okay, okay, okay, but…there is a body. There is a very small, very tiny…tiny body.

The three of them all walk to the suitcase again and look at their sleeping father.

JESSE

We could tell them the truth.

MARNIE

No. Uhn uh.

JESSE

Why not? We didn't do anything. He did it.

MARNIE

Who will believe that?

JESSE

Anyone who knew Dad?

MARNIE turns away from them, performing deep thought.

RORY

Jess, I was thinking. What if you took him back to Japan with you?

JESSE

Huh?

RORY

We could just say that he moved. I mean…he is already in a suitcase.

JESSE

Uh, I don't…I mean I can't really just have Dad living in my dorm room.

RORY

Oh, so it's whatever dad wants as long as it doesn't cramp your love life?

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MARNIE

Okay, I have thought about it, and I think this is beautiful what Dad has done, and we should honor it and the way we should honor it is by having him stay here with you, Rory.

RORY

Oh really?

MARNIE

Yes.

RORY

Mm. Okay. Just a couple questions. What if he needs a doctor? What if he needs to eat? Did he build himself a working toilet in there and if so where does it go?

JESSE

The truth. The truth is the only way out.

RORY

Can you imagine the kind of attention that would bring down on us? I mean, news cameras and Tiktokkers and, I don't know…Ira Glass and and and oh my god REALITY TV.

MARNIE

Oh my gosh reality TV

RORY

Marnie no.

MARNIE

Wait a minute.

RORY

No.

MARNIE

Okay, but just think about it.

JESSE

Marnie.

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MARNIE

We could be rich.

RORY

We could be involuntarily committed.

MARNIE

But richly.

MARNIE starts to move in a slow circle toward the suitcase. RORY starts to walk in a parallel circle, preparing to block MARNIE from accessing the suitcase, eyes locked with MARNIE. Just as they get within reach of the suitcase, JESSE flings his body across the room with a loud

JESSE

Aaaaaaaaaaaaarghhhhhhhhh

grabbing the lid of the suitcase and closing it just before landing full force on top of it. They all gasp. MARNIE covers her face with her hands. For a moment, everything is frozen JESSE gingerly removes himself from the suitcase. They all crouch down. Ever so trepidatiously, he opens the top of the suitcase. They all peer in. Dad is still sleeping peacefully.

MARNIE

He's okay! He's okay, he's okay. Oh thank God.

They all hug each other, crying and laughing with relief. Then the doorbell rings. Their heads all swivel towards it in unison.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

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WEEKDAYS ON THE BLUE LINE

by Carissa J. Ater

CHARACTERS

AGGIE (she/her) - in her mid twenties, reserved
MARTA (she/her) - in her early sixties, matter of fact

SETTING

All scenes take place on the Blue Line light rail. Aggie always sits in the same seat at one end of the car. Aggie does not move during scene transitions.

CONTENT DISCLOSURES

Discussion of death, grief

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WEEKDAYS ON THE BLUE LINE

1. Tuesday, February 1st

MARTA enters the train and sits next to AGGIE. They adjust their bags to make room for each other.

MARTA

Morning, Aggie! It's sunny out today. Finally stopped raining, thank god. Maybe you could head home a little early; see the sun a bit. I think it could do you some good. It did me some good! Got some warmth into these old bones. Not that I'm old, mind you

AGGIE

Of course not.

MARTA

I don't even get some senior discounts yet. Of course, I will next year, but we don't need to think about that. Or talk about it. Actually, pretend I didn't say anything at all. I am young and spry, just like you. How was your morning honey?

AGGIE

It was alright. I made coffee.

MARTA

That's lovely! How was it?

AGGIE

Fine.

MARTA

One of these days, I'll stop at the coffee shop next to the South Ave station and pick you up something on my way in. I don't drink coffee anymore, too much caffeine, but their hot chocolates are delightful.

AGGIE

That's kind of you, Marta, but you don't have to.

2. Friday, February 4th

MARTA enters the train, and quickly walks over to AGGIE. She begins talking before she even sits.

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MARTA

Aggie, do you remember Richard, the head of my HR department that I told you about?

AGGIE

Mhm.

MARTA

You won't believe what this man emailed me last night, *after* work hours, mind you. He asked if I could come in tomorrow, on a *Saturday*, to facilitate a payroll discussion. On a Saturday! Do I look like a woman who goes to work on a Saturday?!

AGGIE

No.

MARTA

Exactly!! I keep my work life contained Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, thank you very much. Weekends are my me time, and I'm not going o change that for some balding middle aged white man whose nickname is 'Dick'. So I emailed him back, which I already think was generous of me, because I was not being paid to write that email, and I said "No thank you, I will not be coming in on a Saturday, I do not get paid to come in on Saturdays." And this grown-ass man, who isn't even my boss, emailed me back and said that he thought I was more "dedicated to the company" than that, and that he was "disappointed" in me!

AGGIE

How dare he.

MARTA

I know!! I'm going to give that man a piece of my mind when I get into work today.

AGGIE

You tell him, Marta.

MARTA

Thank you, honey. How was your morning?

AGGIE

Alright.

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3. Tuesday, February 8th

MARTA enters the train and sits next to AGGIE.

MARTA

Morning, Aggie!

AGGIE

Morning.

MARTA

They're shutting down the metro for an hour today to do some maintenance or something, do you know where you're going to go?

AGGIE

I might go to Emerald Park, up on twenty-seventh. My cousin and I used to go there when she would visit me in the city.

MARTA

That's lovely. Do you see her often?

AGGIE

No. She was supposed to come up in a couple weeks or so but I don't think she's going to anymore.

MARTA

Oh, why not?

AGGIE

Just some family stuff

MARTA

Ah. How was your morning honey?

AGGIE

Alright.

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4. Wednesday, February 16

MARTA enters the train and sits next to AGGIE.

MARTA

Morning, Aggie! You'll never guess who called on me yesterday!

AGGIE

(half-hearted) Who?

MARTA

My neighbor, the handsome librarian! He knocked on my apartment door Saturday afternoon and asked if I had any butter, because he was trying to make pie and ran out. And you know the weekends are my me time, so initially I was perturbed by the interruption, but then I bargained for a slice of the pie in return for the butter and I was feeling rather proud of myself, so when he returned that night with a slice of delicious oatmeal pie I invited him in and made us hot chocolate. And oh! Aggie, he's lovely. He told me about his job, and he organizes the childrens' events at the library, and he taught me a couple of fancy SAT words! Do you know what halcyon means? Because I do! And Aggie, you won't believe this: he's single!

MARTA looks at AGGIE, expecting some excitement or support, but AGGIE looks like she's about to cry or scream.

MARTA

(softly) Oh dear. I'm sorry, I was blabbing on and no paying attention to my surroundings. How was your morning, Aggie?

AGGIE

Alright.

MARTA

…Was it?

A moment passes

and another.

AGGIE looks away.

AGGIE

What does "*halcyon*" mean?

MARTA

Oh! Um, it means "a time in the past that was perfect and happy" or something of that sort.

AGGIE laughs bitterly.

AGGIE

Of course it does.

MARTA

Aggie, are you sure you're alright?

AGGIE

I don't feel like doing this right now.

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MARTA

Forgive me if I'm overstepping, honey, but you seem like you've been going through something recently, and if there's anything I can do…

AGGIE

"Going through something." I guess you could say that.

MARTA

Can I help at all?

AGGIE

I'm fine. Don't worry about it, Marta.

MARTA

Aggie, can I be frank with you for a moment?

AGGIE shrugs.

MARTA

Most people get off the train, when it gets to their stop. Most people only take the blue line once or twice a day. Riding the blue line up and down *every* single day, nonstop, from sunrise to sunset, without even getting off for lunch, isn't something that most people do.

AGGIE

Marta.

MARTA

I'm worried about you. And I have been for months.

AGGIE

Marta…

MARTA

Aggie. What happened, honey?

AGGIE

Do you really care, Marta, or am I just the pet project you adopted because you're lonely and don't have any friends?

Beat.

MARTA stares at AGGIE, coldly. MARTA has never done anything coldly before, so this scares AGGIE a little.

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MARTA

I'm going to let that slide because I actually consider *us* friends. Yes, Aggie, I do care, but if you don't care about me then you can just say so. This isn't some forced relationship, If you don't want me here, I will sit in a different seat on my way to work every morning.

AGGIE takes a second to collect herself.

AGGIE

That's not what I want. Sorry. I don't not want you here, Marta.

MARTA

Good. If you don't want to tell me what you're going through, then don't. It's your business. I'll be here for you regardless.

Beat.

AGGIE is too emotionally raw to hold herself back from MARTA's offer of comfort.

AGGIE

I'm waiting.

MARTA

Waiting?

AGGIE

Just in case.

MARTA

Just in case what, Aggie?

AGGIE

Just in case Jude needs me.

MARTA

Jude?

AGGIE

My fiancé.

AGGIE holds up her hand to show her engagement ring to MARTA.

MARTA

You have a fiancé?

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AGGIE nods.

AGGIE

We're getting married February 20th.

MARTA

That's this weekend.

AGGIE

Yes.

MARTA

Then what are you doing sitting on the blue line everyday?

AGGIE

I'm waiting. Just in case.

MARTA

Just in case Jude needs you?

AGGIE

Yes.

MARTA

Aggie, I'm sorry dear, I'm not following. Why would Jude need you to be on the train?

AGGIE

Because they haven't come home yet. So when they do, they're going to have to take the blue line.

MARTA

…You've been on this train every day that I have for *months*, Aggie.

AGGIE

Tuesday, November 16th.

MARTA

What?

AGGIE

Tuesday, November 16th. Three months ago. Three months ago today. That was the last time I saw Jude.

MARTA

Aggie…

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AGGIE

They took the 7:45 train that morning. They didn't come home that afternoon. The firefighters called me later and told me that Jude was presumed dead. "Presumed." Isn't that stupid? They don't know Jude. *I* do. And Jude wouldn't leave me without saying goodbye. If they were there when that damn fire started, they would have called me to say goodbye.

MARTA

Aggie, I'm sure that Jude-

AGGIE

And we're getting married next weekend. They wouldn't miss that for the world. Their family tried to cancel everything, all the bookings and reservations and vendors, but I wouldn't let them. Because Jude's coming. They've never stood me up, not once, and they're not going to start now. I'll wait here as long as it takes. They'll probably hop on the blue line right as the ceremony is supposed to start, make us both late to our own wedding. They would think it was funny, and I wouldn't mind, not really.

MARTA

Maybe you could wait for them at the venue, honey. Spend hat time with your other loved ones?

AGGIE

No. I don't want them to have to make their way home alone. A lot can change in three months.

AGGIE is set on this.

MARTA

Alright, Aggie. Alright.

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Do Not Print

5. Thursday, February 17th

MARTA enters the train, holding two to-go cups in her hands. She makes her way over to AGGIE.

MARTA

Morning, Aggie. I finally went back to that coffee shop on South Ave. Got you a cappuccino with vanilla; wasn't sure what you liked, but this seemed rather fancy and sweet, just like you.

AGGIE

You didn't have to.

MARTA

No, but I wanted to get a hot chocolate, and grabbing you something too is easy enough. How was your morning?

AGGIE takes the cappuccino.

AGGIE

It was alright. Thank you.

MARTA

It's cold out today. This city can never just pick one kind of weather, can it? It has to keep us on our toes. Speaking of which, my toes are *cold*! Hope you wore some warm socks today Aggie, it's a chilly one.

AGGIE takes a sip.

6. Sunday, February 20th

AGGIE is fiddling with a veil. MARTA enters the train and sits next to AGGIE. AGGIE looks up in surprise.

MARTA

Morning, Aggie.

AGGIE

It's a Sunday.

MARTA

It is.

They adjust their bags to make room for each other.

AGGIE

You don't take the train on weekends.

MARTA

Not usually, no.

AGGIE

It's your "me time".

MARTA

It usually is, yes.

AGGIE

Why are you here, Marta?

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MARTA

It's February 20th. So I'm going to ride the Blue Line with you. 'Till sunset.

AGGIE looks at MARTA for a long second, then buries her head into MARTA's shoulder. MARTA hugs her tightly.

A moment passes.

MARTA

How was your morning, Aggie?

AGGIE

Bad.

MARTA

And that's alright, Aggie. That's alright.

END OF PLAY.

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