

SWAP
A Romance

A Play in One Act

by Nicolas Greco

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Cast of Characters

<u>CORA:</u>	A large woman, any age.
<u>BELL:</u>	A thin man, any age.
<u>MAN:</u>	A businessman, 40's. Nonspeaking.
<u>GIRL:</u>	A young, punk girl, 16 years old. Nonspeaking.
<u>ANNOUNCER:</u>	Announcer for South Ferry Station.

Scene

A bench in the South Ferry Station waiting area in New York City.

Time

1:10PM. The present.

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(*SETTING: South Ferry Station in New York City. About 1:10PM.*)

(*AT RISE: Lights up on a small bench. A MAN is sitting, reading a newspaper. A GIRL is sitting at the other end of the bench, leaving a space between them. She is listening to music, loudly, through headphones, which we can definitely hear. CORA, a large and dour woman, enters carrying a large briefcase. It should look like something that a man would carry to work in the 1960's. She stands over the two strangers, staring at them. The MAN with the newspaper looks up and notices CORA. He freezes. He quickly rises and offers his seat to her and moves to the side of the bench. The GIRL, still listening to her music, does not notice CORA. CORA stands there, motionless. The man with the newspaper taps the girl with the headphones, strongly. She is startled and upset with him. She turns off her music and takes her headphones off. She looks at the MAN, who is motionless. She turns around and sees CORA. She quickly gets up and stands next to the bench with the man. She puts her headphones back on but doesn't turn her music back on. CORA stands, staring at them for a very long time before putting her briefcase on the bench and sitting beside it. She sits motionless, cold, empty. Beside the bench, the MAN and GIRL stand, motionless as well. There is a feeling of fear in the air. Looks are exchanged between the man and the girl, but nothing is said.*)

ANNOUNCER

(On P.A. system)

The ferry will be loading momentarily. The Staten Island Ferry is owned and operated by the New York Department of Transportation and is free of charge.

(The GIRL turns her music back on. The MAN and GIRL take one last quick look at CORA and hurriedly exit, leaving CORA, her briefcase and the bench, alone. BELL, a young man, thin, malnourished, enters. He carries with him a very small, square box with a handle. He moves slowly with a limp and protruding out of his torso are many, many steel rods and tubes. In his other hand, he drags an IV pole, which carries two bags. One is filled with blood and the other a clear liquid. They appear to be pumping into his stomach. He slowly shuffles up to the bench, looks at CORA. She doesn't move. BELL starts to say something, but thinks better of it. He sits. This is an arduous task and takes just as long as it would if he were an anciently old man. He readjusts his tubes and rods, squeezes his bag to make sure it is still working properly and sets his little box down on the bench. CORA slowly turns toward him.)

CORA

Not there.

BELL

What?

CORA

Not there. You can't sit there.

BELL

I...what? I didn't see anyone else sitting here. Is there someone sitting here?

CORA

I'm sitting here.

BELL

Yes. I see that. But...but is there someone else here? Someone's seat I took?

CORA

Yes.

(Pause)

BELL

Oh.

(Beat)

Then I guess I'll just get up...?

CORA

Yup.

(This, again, takes a very long time. Maybe even longer than sitting down. He goes through the routine of fiddling with his tubes and rods and once up, stands in front of the bench, adjusting his bag.)

CORA

Don't forget your little...

BELL

Hmm?

CORA

Your little box. Don't forget your little box.

(Beat)

BELL

You want me to...um...

CORA

What?

BELL

Can you just...

CORA

I want you to take your little box off my bench. Yes. Is that what you're trying to ask me?

BELL

No...can you...nevermind.

(BELL, again, struggles to reach down and retrieve the box. Once he has it, he resumes standing in his usual position in front of the bench. CORA is staring at him, menacingly. He smiles, looks over to CORA, who continues to stare at him. He takes one step away from her. Looks back at her. She is still staring. He takes another step and another until he is no longer in front of the bench. He is off to the side of it now. She slowly turns away and faces forward again.)

BELL

I didn't mean to...did I...did I do something to offend you?

CORA

Do you think you did?

BELL

No.

CORA

Then I guess you didn't.

BELL

It's just that...I don't think that there's anyone else sitting there and I was just really hoping to sit down for a bit. You see, I have this condition.

CORA

You do?

BELL

Yes, I have -

CORA

- I was kidding. Of course. I see you have all kinds of shit wrong with you.

BELL

Oh...you *do*...okay, well, I was wondering if I could just sit down for a bit, you see...

CORA

I don't think that's a good idea.

BELL

I'm not...I'm not contagious or anything.

CORA

I didn't think you were.

BELL

Oh...so, you're just a...

(Beat)

CORA

A what?

BELL

Nothing.

CORA

Oh. Okay. Because for a second there, I thought you were going to say I was a bitch.

BELL

No. No, I...didn't...

CORA

(Continuing)

And I was like, "this guy is balsy!" I mean, "this guy has got some real brass balls!" But, no? You weren't going to say that?

BELL

No.

CORA

Oh. Okay. Well, that's probably good. I mean, it probably wouldn't look good for either of us to be fighting here. I mean, you're practically a retard and I'm a woman. I mean, if I beat you up, I'd be picking on you, but if you beat me up, you're beating up a woman. Not that I think you could. Do you know what I mean?

BELL

(Scared)

I'm not a...I don't want to fight you.

CORA

Obviously.

(Pause)

CORA

Listen, I don't know if you're getting on the next ferry or not, but if you are, I want to tell you right now, you're not sitting with me. The last thing I need is someone like you with all this shit going on, crowding my space or getting in my way when I'm trying to get up. I'm a fidgety traveler and I don't need you messing with my comfort.

BELL

I wasn't going to -

CORA

Even if there aren't enough seats and there's only one seat left and it's next to me, you're not sitting there. Although, I'd be amazed if there were only two seats left and they happened to be together. That wouldn't make sense. I mean, that would be an entire boat full of couples and that sounds stupid. There are too many single people in the world. And too many people who don't want to sit with other people. And I'm one of them. That's why there's going to be no chance of us sitting together. Is that clear?

BELL

I -

CORA

And if there's only one seat left...guess what? I'm getting it. You're going to have to stand. It doesn't look like you mind standing that much, anyway. Besides, it's not like you're going to beat me on it. It took you about an hour to get up and down off this bench. I'll bet it takes forever for you to board a boat.

BELL

(Motions to the bench)

Are you sure there's someone sitting here?

CORA

Look, the ferry's gonna be here soon, anyway. I'm assuming you're on your way to the mall? You should just wait it out. Wait it out 'till the next one. It won't be long.

(Pause. CORA clutches her chest and writhes in pain.)

BELL

Are you...oh, my...Are you okay?

CORA

Shhh!

BELL

Um...what?

CORA

Shut up! Just shut up!

BELL

I...do you need help?

CORA

What are you going to do, hook me up to your colostomy bag?! Just shut up for a second!

BELL

Okay...

(CORA searches through her pockets while shifting her weight around, trying to ease the pain coursing through her chest. She produces a small winding key like you'd use for an old clock. She puts it into her chest and winds it many times. The pain subsides, temporarily. She leaves the key in her chest. CORA eases herself back into her seat. Pause)

BELL

Holy...I didn't...

CORA

You mean "holy crap," and "I didn't know you had a heart condition. That's so sad." Is that what you meant?

BELL

Well...I guess...yes.

CORA

Well, you can stop now.

BELL

I can...what?

CORA

You can stop now. You can stop all the caring. You can stop all the worrying about the girl with the wind-up heart. You can just stop. Okay?

BELL

I wasn't worrying...I was...

CORA

You weren't worrying?

BELL

No. I mean, I was...but I'm not...it's not "worrying".

CORA

It's what?

BELL

I don't know...but, what would've been so bad if...forget it...

CORA

No. What? You're what? Pitying me?

BELL

What?

CORA

Pitying me?

BELL

Well...

(Pause. CORA stares at him)

CORA

Screw you.

BELL

Look, it's...I do this. It's not you, it's me.

(Slight beat.)

CORA

(sarcastically)

Oh! Is it you? I couldn't tell.

BELL

It's not that big a deal, you know...having people feel bad for you. I feel like it's kind of good, even, you know...when, like, people feel bad for you it makes you feel like there are people out there who still have feelings, you know?

(Pause)

CORA

What?

BELL

I'm saying... It's not that big a deal, you know...having people feel bad for you. I feel like it's kind of good, even, you know...when, like, people feel bad for you it makes you feel like there are people out there who still have feelings, you know?

(Slight pause.)

CORA

I'm sorry. That's my fault. I asked, "What?" And I should have assumed that you would take that to mean that I wanted you to repeat yourself. I mean, the *word-for-word* of it I didn't exactly see coming, but you were right to waste all that breath. That one's on me. What I should have said was, "that's the biggest load of crap I've ever heard. People don't give A, TWO, or any numerical value of *craps* after that, about each other. I can't believe that *you* of all people care about these bleeding hearts, who go around, exposing themselves...emotionally, I mean. They don't care about you. Not really. They pass you by, they smile. They give you money -

BELL

I'm not a beggar.

CORA

"Or, whatever...*change* -"

BELL

I'm not homeless.

CORA

"They're only doing that so they can feel better about themselves. They probably don't know what it's like to be born to be anything but what they are. They don't know how hard it is
(cont.)

CORA (*cont.*)

and they can't even begin to comprehend what it's like to be someone like you...with all that crap wrong with you. So, they stare. And they see how ugly it all is, and all they can do is smile. All they can do is *smile* to make sure that you can't see that what they're really thinking is, 'I wish I didn't have to see *this*.' So, when they help you up the stairs with your little box and your pipes and bags and crap, they're really just helping themselves. They want to just make themselves feel better about thinking something that they can't helping thinking. Something awful. Something ugly. They're *weak* and they're *selfish*. And the fact that you care about them having the capacity to feel *anything* about *anything* is absurd." That's what I should have said. That's my mistake.

(*Pause*)

BELL

So...we'll just sit here...?

CORA

No. You should stand.

(*Pause. CORA winds the key*)

BELL

My aunt had a pretty bad heart condition. She always walked around like she was in a lot of pain, and getting up the steps was a really hard thing for her. She had one of those 'lifeline' things that people wear around their necks. Remember the "*I've fallen and I can't get up*" lady? It's really much bigger than you think. We used to say that she was trying to be like Flava Flav...she didn't like that...I don't think she knew who Flava Flav was. And I had a dog, and it was not the best dog. After I got my third operation, the doctor told my mom that a dog would be a good idea...like, it would help me cope with some of the stuff I was dealing with. But, we didn't have any money because of the operations, so we adopted a dog, like, from a shelter, which was strange because my mom isn't the type to save anything. Like, not leftovers, nothing...so, you know, a dog was weird for her. So, we get this dog home and, you know, it's not really well trained. It kind of bites things...people...and it took my blood bag and ripped it open once. And I lost blood. Like, a lot. And losing blood is like eating turkey. it just makes you all sleepy...so, I just kind of kept sleeping. I didn't really notice it'd happened. But when my mom got home she was really pissed, you know, 'cause she thought I was dead. So,

(*cont.*)

BELL (cont.)

she flips out at the dog and she's beating the bejeezus out of it. I didn't watch her do it or anything...I just kind of heard it, 'cause I was still kind of in and out at the time. We went to the hospital, and I was okay, but my mom made us give the dog away. My aunt took it. But it was like, of course she did, because she was just nice like that. Like, she always did, like, the "good thing". And it really was a miracle, because, like, a few months after, she had another heart attack, and it was a big one, and she fell down and never pressed that emergency button on her chest. And after she passed out, well, the dog must've pressed it for her because she ended up being okay.

CORA

Okay.

BELL

You see, it's kind of cool that it happened like that. Like, it was a bad dog for me but a really good dog for someone else.

CORA

Okay.

BELL

And...people...people are like that, too. Just because a person seems bad at one time doesn't mean that sometime later, they won't be good, you know?

CORA

Okay.

BELL

Like, maybe it was meant for the dog to bite my blood bag and try to kill me so that my aunt had to take the dog and the dog could save her life, you know...?

CORA

I guess the dog didn't bite hard enough.

BELL

I'm saying...it's like fate, or whatever...you know...? How things like that work out...? Like, it was meant for that to happen.

CORA

Where's the dog now?

Dead. BELL

Your aunt? CORA

Also BELL

Also? CORA

Dead. BELL

Great story. CORA

(Pause. BELL doesn't move, but CORA gets startled and clutches the briefcase.)

Don't! CORA

What? BELL

I saw you. Don't think I didn't see you try to reach for my briefcase. Try again, you turd! Try again and see what happens! CORA

I didn't... BELL

Except that you did. CORA

I really don't think I did anything. BELL

You know! You know you were trying to steal my stuff! Laughable! HA! A cripple like you, trying to swipe something of mine?! Let me ask you, how far do you think you'll get if you took it? Five feet? Ten, if you're lucky? I will crap inside you if you try anything. CORA

BELL

You will...what? No...I didn't...I don't even want to...I mean, I don't even know what's in there!

CORA

But you can imagine, right?

BELL

No...I don't -

CORA

Guess. Guess what's in here.

BELL

I don't know...I wouldn't know.

CORA

No. You wouldn't. *Guess.*

BELL

I don't know...it could be literally anything. A calculator?

CORA

Not even close. God, you're thick.

BELL

I wasn't even...look, I'm just trying to be nice. I'm sorry. We can just wait here quietly for the ferry, if you want.

CORA

No.

BELL

But, I actually thought that's what you wanted.

CORA

No.

BELL

But...but then, we're just fighting.

CORA

Yup. Well, one of us is. The other is just losing.

BELL

Look, I just...I just wanted to share something that I thought
(*cont.*)

BELL (*cont.*)

mattered. I'm very sorry. I'm very sorry that you don't want to hear what I have to say. I'm sorry that I've bothered you. And I really wasn't trying to get your business case.

CORA

It's called a briefcase. You know that.

BELL

Well, you're making me nervous. And I wasn't after it. I just...I just...look, I just like to share sometimes. It's hard for me. It's hard for me to put myself out there. I'm not the best-looking guy. And my...this...

(*motions to his tubes and rods*)

...all this is pretty not good.

CORA

(*She winds the key*)

You know, this isn't easy to live with, either.

BELL

I'm sure it's hard. I'm just kind of...

CORA

If you say 'sorry' I'm going to kick you in the nuts.

BELL

I was going to say 'jealous'.

(*They both laugh. Pause*)

CORA

(*Winds the key*)

It's not easy for me, you know. I have to be tough. People pick on me. People are scared of me. I have to be tough.

BELL

People pick on me, too. People are scared of me, too. I have to be tough...but I'm not. I'm -

CORA

Weak.

BELL

I was going to say 'soft'.

Both. CORA

They're the same. BELL

They're not. CORA

(Pause)

I'm not a nice person. CORA

I'm too nice sometimes. BELL

I want to be, though. CORA

(Pause)

I was in love once. CORA

I fall in love almost everyday. BELL

I hated it. CORA

I love it. BELL

(Pause)

It hurts, you know. Not the breakup part. Although, that's pretty bad, too. But there's another pain. There's a pain from *hoping* that you'll fall in love soon. There's a pain that happens because there is just absolutely nothing to live for. So, you *hope* for that feeling to come. When it doesn't, there's pain. Do you know it? Do you know how much it hurts when you're trying to fall in love?

CORA
No. But I know how *safe* it feels when you're *not* trying to fall in love. There's pain in that, too.

(Pause. During the next exchange, BELL starts to sit on the bench. CORA

*doesn't object or even notice that she
has allowed him in her space)*

CORA

I've done some terrible things.

BELL

So have I.

CORA

I've hurt people.

BELL

So have I.

CORA

Sometimes, I'm a jerk on purpose.

BELL

I know.

(Pause. CORA stares at him)

Sorry. So am I.

CORA

I'll bet that's not true.

BELL

You're right. It's not.

CORA

One time at work, I told my boss my coworker...he was my friend, too, at the time...was stealing office supplies. It might've been him. Or not. Got him fired.

BELL

I once got fired for nothing at all, but didn't argue it.

CORA

I hate myself.

BELL

So do I.

CORA

I purposely try to hurt people. It ends up hurting me. I think that's my plan.

BELL

Everyone does that.

CORA

I was in love once. I thought I was. He was sweet and kind and better looking than me. He didn't care that I gained weight and he always noticed when I lost it.

(She winds the key.)

I think he loved me. I resented him for that. I hated that he was able to do that, to love something so completely. I pushed him away, slowly, at first. I wanted to test him. I wanted to see if he would fight me. He did. I knew he was fighting for us. I hated him for that, too. In the end, there was nothing left to fight for.

(Pause)

I can't remember his face. I can remember how the food smelled on our second date, but I cannot picture his face.

(Pause)

Truthfully, I was jealous. Jealous that he could feel love. Jealous that he could put his attention on anything but himself. Jealous that he had someone who was enough for him. Why can't I have that? Don't I deserve it, too?

(Pause)

I can't remember his face. I deserve *that*. When he left, he left quietly. I think he knew that my heart would've actually broken if he slammed the door.

(Long pause)

BELL

I saw that the dog was going to go for the blood. I *wanted* him to. I didn't care anymore. When my mom was beating the dog, I didn't have the guts to tell her that it was me. I lured him to it. I wanted him to do it. When we were in the hospital, I didn't have the guts to tell her I didn't want to live anymore. When the dog died, I didn't have the guts to bury it like my mom asked me to. I let my aunt do it. When she digs, her heart gives out. I didn't even have the guts to go to her funeral.

(Pause. We can hear the chains rattling against the ferry outside.)

BELL

My name is Bell.

CORA

My name is Cora.

(BELL looks down at his box. He hands it to her)

BELL

I think you should have this.

(CORA is hesitant to take it. She opens it, slowly. We hear a heartbeat. She starts to cry. She hands him the briefcase. BELL puts it on his lap and opens it. Intestines, blood and guts fall out in a sloppy mess at his feet.)

ANNOUNCER

(On P.A. system)

May I have your attention please? The next boat will be 1:30.
1:30.

(CORA and BELL stare at each other.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)