

ZEN
& THE ART
OF MOURNING
A MOTHER

by

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CHARACTERS

(5 women)

SARAH	28 in 1993. Daughter of Angie. Mother of Isabelle. Immensely insecure, she tries really, really hard.
ANGIE	18 in 1963 on the train. 48 in 1993 and dying. A vibrant dancer. Even dying, she is stunning, a disguise she used to hide her queerness all her life.
LOIS	18 in 1963. Angie's best friend. Also a dancer.
DENISE	28 in 1993. Daughter of Lois. Tall and thin. (She reads <i>Trauma and Recovery</i> by Judith Herman.)
ISABELLE	Almost 14 in 2003. Daughter of Sarah. Kinetic, musical, sprite-like and wired.

PLACE

Scene 1 -- A hospital room in New York City, 1993

Scene 2 -- The Main Concourse, 30th Street Station, Philadelphia

Scene 3 -- The train platform, Track 9, 30th Street Station, Philadelphia
(this is an outdoor space underground)

Scene 4 -- The Minuteman Train from Philadelphia to New York

(Two train cars, the pass-through space between, and an outdoor space at the back of the train consisting of a ledge and a bar. There is a forward/future and a backward/past.)

Scene 5 -- The hospital room again in New York City. 1993

TIME -- Scenes 2, 3, and 4 occur in three overlapping times. 1993 (older Angie, Sarah and Denise), but Angie quickly sheds years and becomes her younger self in 1963 with Lois. Isabelle exists on stage in 2003. Scenes 1 and 5 occur in 1993.

INTERRUPTIONS/PACING -- Sarah (and others) interrupt and/or continue speaking over others. If an asterisk (*) interrupts a line, this indicates where the next speaker interrupts the speaker in dialogue. If a line begins with an asterisk, check your cue in the line above. Ellipses (...) mean the character cannot fill in the following words because they are at a loss.

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ZEN & the Art of Mourning a Mother

SCENE 1

(At rise: a hospital room with the sound of oxygen tanks and a flat line for a heart rate -- the sound of death. An unmade bed. SARAH enters dressed in a suburban version of what might be taken to be an attempt to be urban and sophisticated, slightly behind this minute (1993) but expensive. She is carrying her large purse which includes the Sunday Times magazine, and in her hands are several other magazines and newspapers, a few dollars and change, two iced coffees from a deli in a bag which is wet and threatening to rip through, and she has never been the kind of woman who could walk well in heels.)

SARAH

Mother? Mother...

(SARAH may or may not make it to a place to put all her stuff before her arms and legs betray her, and everything goes flying, but she needs to get to the bed. She checks to see if the sheets are cold.)

SARAH

Mother!

(ANGIE enters from bathroom elegant yet dying with oxygen tubing at her nose, another tube attached to her back to drain her chest fluid into a box which she carries while pushing her IV. She is in no rush. She is not pleased to see Sarah.)

ANGIE

What are you doing here Sarah?

SARAH

I was just going to ask you where you went.

ANGIE

I see you've already made a mess of things.

SARAH

Yes, I'll fix it. I'm sorry. But that sound, mother, why don't they come running?

ANGIE

Why? You mean the monitor?

(ANGIE puts the monitor on her finger and sound of death stops.)

ANGIE

They won't come running. I signed a DNR.

SARAH

A what?

ANGIE

It's a form that means "do not resuscitate."

SARAH

But that's... But it's a hospital... They're trained... They can... That's what you want?

ANGIE

I signed the form, didn't I?

SARAH

Well... you look wonderful.

(SARAH starts to pick up all the things she dropped.)

ANGIE

How should I look?

SARAH

I just - I mean I didn't expect you to -- but you're so beautiful, not that I'm surprised, I mean, you're always beautiful -- um, I brought you the newspapers.

ANGIE

You know it's a curse.

SARAH

What is?

ANGIE

Looking beautiful even when things go wrong. It's a curse. My mother had it too. No one could tell she was sick. That's why they never caught it, until it was too late. But it skipped you.

SARAH

What skipped me?

ANGIE

The curse. I knew even when you were little, you looked so pathetic when you got sick, like anyone else who got sick, not like my mother, not like me, where no one ever cared, because it didn't seem possible. We're cursed that way.

SARAH

I'm sorry Mother. I brought you magazines!

ANGIE

I have magazines.

SARAH

You gave me a terrible fright, being gone like that.

ANGIE

I'm not dead yet.

SARAH (continuing)

I didn't know they let you out of bed,

ANGIE

I do what I can do.

SARAH (continuing)

and I felt the mattress to see if it was cold, I did, I thought you might be, well, I thought I might be too late.

ANGIE (talks over SARAH now)

As long as I have the strength to get up, I get up.

SARAH

I got us ice coffees with Sweet & Low. Sorry. There's a little left in this one.

(SARAH gets paper towels and mops the ice coffees from the floor.)

ANGIE (continuing)

As long as my fluid drains out my back into the box, and I keep my oxygen on. The tubing stretches pretty far. I can do all the things I did yesterday. I don't know why you come here. I asked you to stay home.

SARAH

But I can't just let you -- be here -- alone when you're so sick like this with no one to take care of you.

ANGIE

If I wanted you to take care of me, I would have checked into a hospital in Philadelphia.

SARAH

You still could, and I would.

ANGIE

I came to New York to be left alone. If you had any sense at all, you would do that.

SARAH

Do what?

ANGIE

Get out of here Sarah.

SARAH

Mother, I want very much to make you happy, and --

ANGIE

Sarah, happiness has to come from within. We don't count on others to make us happy.

SARAH

I would leave you, Mother, if that is what you want me to do, I would, but I was on the train today, and something happened, and I just wanted to tell you this one little thing, because --

ANGIE
Sarah, I've had enough.

SARAH
But I could help you,

ANGIE
I don't want your help.

SARAH (continues)
make you feel more comfortable,

ANGIE
You don't listen.

SARAH (continuing)
bring you sorbet from the cafeteria.

ANGIE
I have never wanted your help.

SARAH (continuing)
or go out and get the good kind,

ANGIE
I have been a terrible person.

SARAH (continuing)
I don't mind.

ANGIE
A terrible mother to you.

SARAH (continuing)
It's not like I'm here all the time.

ANGIE
You think it's all your fault, but it's mine.

SARAH (continuing)
I'm leaving in two hours to get home in time to pick up Isabelle.

ANGIE

I might have told you this sooner. You could have saved yourself all that therapy.

SARAH (continuing)

She is so smart, you won't believe --

ANGIE

Sarah, shut up!

SARAH

I scheduled her for a full day so I could spend more time with you.

ANGIE

This isn't spending time -- we are only in the same room. You don't listen. I could kill someone for a cigarette!!! What were you saying?

SARAH

About Isabelle being so smart.

ANGIE

Well of course she's smart, she takes after me, and my mother.

SARAH

Outside preschool this morning, she refused to go in, so I thought it might be separation anxiety. She kept trying to get back into the car, and I was trying to reassure her, saying, "Mommy will come back, Mommy will come back", but it wasn't that at all.

ANGIE

Whatever did it turn out to be?

SARAH

I left her lunch in the car, and she didn't want to go hungry all afternoon. She just didn't know the word for lunch.

ANGIE

Or idiot.

SARAH

Okay Mother, I see your point.

ANGIE

No, you don't. I'm trying to tell you something, and you're ignoring me.

SARAH

No, I'm not. I'm right here. I'm --

ANGIE

Sarah, I am dying.

SARAH

Mom, don't say that.

ANGIE

You and I both know that I am dying, and I want to die in peace, in New York City where I always wanted to live, so I never did manage to live here, but maybe I can die here, and I don't want you around when I do it.

SARAH

Did I do something wrong?

ANGIE

It has nothing to do with you. I promise.

SARAH

I must've done something wrong.

ANGIE

I don't want you to obsess on this for the rest of your life paying every therapist on the Eastern Seaboard all of your husband's money, so please Sarah,

SARAH

I just have one therapist.

ANGIE (continuing)

get this through your thick skull. I never loved you. I was never even nice to you. Not once.

SARAH

But I forgive you Mom. I know it's hard to be nice to me.

ANGIE

No, you were a perfectly lovely baby. It would have been easy for anyone. Just, you got me. It wasn't your fault. I am not a nice person. I never was.

SARAH

But that's not true!

ANGIE

If I tell you I wasn't nice, I wasn't nice.

SARAH

But you give to charity. You volunteer. You're on the board at the library.

ANGIE

That's not what I mean.

SARAH

You were always nice to Daddy.

ANGIE

Oh please! I told him not to come here. When it's all over, ask him for the truth. Tell him I said it was okay. Tell him to explain it all. Everything.

SARAH

You're nice to your friends. You let Mrs. Lieb use your yard for that party last spring.

ANGIE

That's not what I'm talking about Sarah.

SARAH

Then explain it to me Mother, because I don't understand.

ANGIE

I never act out of love. I never feel love. I never have a loving impulse.

SARAH

That's ridiculous.

ANGIE

When you were a child, for instance, I never felt anything. Well, I felt things. I felt anger and resentment. But I was never moved to wipe a tear from your eye, or kiss your scabby knees....

SARAH

That can't be true. I'm sure I'll think of something.

ANGIE

You can't be sure. You're not me.

SARAH

What do you mean Daddy will explain everything? What does that mean?

ANGIE

There was only one time, a feeling came over me, maybe it was love. I hope it was love, I mean if that was the only time I ever had that feeling in my entire life, then I damn sure hope it was love.

SARAH

You mean for Daddy?

ANGIE

Not Daddy, never Daddy, Daddy's gay.

SARAH

Daddy's gay?

ANGIE

Do you have to shout? In 1963 it wasn't so easy to be like that. We made a deal. It was a long time ago. Listen, you tell him I told his secret, so now he can tell mine.

SARAH

You didn't love Daddy?

ANGIE

I am talking about some crazy screwed up kid.

SARAH

You used to tell me I was a screwed up kid.

ANGIE

I'm sorry to say it wasn't you.

SARAH

Oh.

ANGIE

She was a teenager, barely,

SARAH

A girl?

ANGIE (continuing)

took drugs or something. I met her on a train. Thirty years ago. I'll never forget it. She was young, and she was dressed strangely. She reminded me of my own mother. As if my mother was there, only young.

SARAH

You must've loved your mother.

ANGIE

Of course I loved my mother. We're not talking about my mother.

SARAH

But that proves that you loved.

ANGIE

I mean as an adult. This girl on the train, she told me a story about some towers that fell from the sky. She spoke like a poet, as if she'd learned a different kind of lullaby. An artist. Unique to herself.

SARAH

I'm sorry, did you say something?

ANGIE

Yes, Sarah, I said something. Weren't you listening to me?

SARAH

I was trying to think. This is awfully confusing.

ANGIE

You'll get over it.

SARAH

I'm sure there's something you did with love, as an adult.

ANGIE

Forget love. I don't know about love. Just something nice. Love is so big. I'm gonna tell you a story.

SARAH

Really? Is this the end?

ANGIE

I'm not gonna die this second. Sit.

SARAH

Can I make you more comfortable, plump your pillows, fix your --

ANGIE

If you come any closer, I'm gonna hit you.

SARAH

Sorry. Daddy's gay?

ANGIE

Sit! This isn't about that. This is about the only time in my life I was nice.

SARAH

Telling me a story's nice.

ANGIE

So this'll be the second time. But on one condition.

SARAH

Whatever you want.

ANGIE

When I'm done, you leave here, and you don't come back.

SARAH

But what if you...

ANGIE

That's the point, Sarah. I will, and there is nothing you can do about it. They will ship my body to the mortuary in Philadelphia. It's all taken care of already. You don't have to be here.

SARAH

I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say what if you need something?

ANGIE

I need a cigarette!!!!

SARAH

Should I go get you some?

ANGIE

And kill me quicker?

SARAH

Of course not, *I didn't mean to –

ANGIE

*Or blow us all up? With all the oxygen running in here?

SARAH

Sorry.

ANGIE

I know you're anxious to be done with me.

SARAH

That is completely untrue!

ANGIE

Don't worry Sarah, I am not going to make this any harder than it has to be. I have signed all kinds of papers, so that when I go, I'll go. I will not linger. And no one, not even the highly trained hospital staff is permitted to resuscitate me.

SARAH

(pained)

Oh, oh mother, I don't know what to say...

ANGIE

Thank you usually works. Now the day I took the train to New York –

SARAH

Is this a story I'm gonna remember?

ANGIE

I hope so.

SARAH

Because maybe I should take notes. My memory is pretty shot these days, and --

ANGIE

Sarah, no notes. I think it's a good story. I think you'll remember it because it'll be the last thing I ever say to you, so listen carefully.

SARAH

But --

ANGIE

No notes!

SARAH

No, I mean, was I there?

ANGIE

Where?

SARAH

In your story? Because if we get to the middle and suddenly I start to have memories, then I could have anxiety, and I have a tendency to repress, so maybe I should run out and get a tape recorder in case I'm not always present, cause even though I mean to be present, I can't always stay calm. So was I there?

ANGIE

When were you born?

SARAH

June twenty-second, 1964. Don't you remember?

ANGIE

The story happened in 1963, in September. Before you. Before Kennedy. Before all the other tragedies in the world. Well, my mother was already dead a year. But you weren't born yet. You weren't even in me. I was a kid. I was eighteen years old. And I was gorgeous.

(ANGIE transforms into her 18 year old self in 1963.)

ANGIE (continuing)

I asked Lois Hammond to come along, to help me with all my luggage,

(LOIS enters 30th Street Station in her
1963 traveling outfit with Angie's luggage,
and her own small overnight bag.)

ANGIE (continuing)

and she was coming out of a bad situation with her boss, and I wanted to cheer her up, to show her there was more to life than...

SARAH

That was nice.

ANGIE

Well... there's more to it than that, but... I did pay for her ticket and offer a night on the town to help me settle in.

SARAH

Well that was a nice thing.

ANGIE

Yes, okay. A long time ago. This was before everything changed.

SARAH

You mean stuff happened that made you stop being nice?

ANGIE

Don't you remember Lois?

SARAH

Should I?

ANGIE

Yes. She used to teach you ballet.

SARAH

You mean Madame Vel-LEN?!

ANGIE

She wasn't French back then. She was just plain Lois. She was my closest friend. And this was before she got all mixed up with that Vincent VEL-len.

SARAH

Mom.

ANGIE

She had terrible luck with men.* I guess we both had ...

SARAH

*Mom, I don't mean to interrupt, but --

ANGIE

But you are.

SARAH

But this morning, when I came in on the train, remember I said to you that something happened on the train? Well, I ran into Denise, Madame Vel-LEN's daughter!

(Earlier that day DENISE enters 30th Street Station with her briefcase, purse and weekend bag. She sits on a bench, takes out her book and reads.)

(SARAH and ANGIE as before in hospital.)

SARAH

She lives in New York now and works as a --

ANGIE

Sarah.

SARAH

Sorry. I didn't mean to.

ANGIE

But you did.

SARAH

It's just that she was telling me that her mother is also dying, and they have no help,

ANGIE

Lois is dying?

SARAH (continuing)

no way to keep her comfortable, why it's awful the way they live, and I felt so terrible for them.

ANGIE

She made her bed.

SARAH

I never knew you were friends with her.

ANGIE

There are a lot of things that you don't know about me, like how I had you, and why I married your father, and why I turned out to be such a royal bitch, and why there's nothing to do about it now but tell you the story and ask you to hold up your end of the bargain and leave me alone when I'm done.

SARAH

I'll try Mother.

ANGIE

Trying isn't good enough.

SARAH

But you're sick, and I'm a nervous wreck about it.

ANGIE

What else is new?

SARAH

Please don't do this Mother. I was on the train this morning, and I ran into Denise Vellen, and I want you to know what she told me, especially if you knew her mother, because --

ANGIE

Sarah, this is not an excuse. You know I don't believe in excuses. But I was so young when my own mother died, I thought her death gave me wisdom, made me mature. I thought I could go rushing out into life knowing more than everyone else, but all you get when your mother dies,

ANGIE (continued)

no matter how old you are, is sadness and grief and regret. And if you don't know how to dance, you don't learn it from living through death. And if you don't know how to take care of yourself, you don't learn that either. But the day I got Lois to help me move to New York City, that day I didn't know that I didn't know anything.

SCENE 2

(1963: ANGIE moves into the train station looking for LOIS who is sitting on the rest of ANGIE's luggage.)

ANGIE

Lois, over here! It's this way. Track 9.

LOIS

All right. I'm coming.

(LOIS begins to lug a heavy set of matching bags from one side of the station to the entrance to Track 9 and ANGIE goes to help her.)

ANGIE

Are you okay? You still feel poorly?

LOIS

I'm okay. I'll get over it.

ANGIE

Of course you will!

LOIS

You can start a brand new life.

ANGIE

You can too, Lois. Anything could happen!

LOIS

Everything you've imagined...

ANGIE

You can imagine too Lois.

LOIS

Oh, I don't do much imagining, Angie.

(1993: SARAH moves into 30th Street Station with her purse, lost.)

ANGIE

But you should. Why, just the other day, I was thinking I'd be your bridesmaid. I thought you'd pick yellow, and I'd wear a sharp little suit with matching shoes and gloves and a hat... I didn't think it would be formal, being his second and all. I guess we were both wrong. I mean, I never met him, but I used to think your boss was going to turn out to be a swell guy.

LOIS

You imagined all that?

ANGIE

Oh, I had the whole thing planned.

LOIS

For me and him?

ANGIE

Well... you have to dream, right?

LOIS

Don't.

ANGIE

I thought about where* you could have it, and --

LOIS

*Stop. It's over now. I'll be fine. My mother says that there are lots of opportunities out there for young women like ourselves.

ANGIE

Your mother knows?

LOIS

Not a thing. I just told her that I didn't really like my job, and she's been helping me look. If she knew he fired me, after all that happened, well, I don't know what she'd think.

ANGIE

I hope this takes your mind off of everything you've been through, although you can be thankful for one thing.

LOIS

What's that?

ANGIE

That you didn't get you-know-what...

LOIS

Angie, your imagination must be in overdrive. How do you sleep at night? Figuring out that he's a jerk, fine. Losing my job over it, okay. I'll find another job. But if I had to make that kind of decision?

ANGIE

Oh, come on. We would have gone together.

LOIS

That's not a shopping trip.

ANGIE

No but I would have held your hand.

LOIS

Thanks Angie.

ANGIE

There are places to go in New York.

LOIS

Yes, even my mother mentioned something.

ANGIE

She did?

LOIS

This very morning. She took my hands in hers, and she looked so seriously into my eyes. "You aren't going to New York City for any specific reason are you?"

ANGIE

She doesn't like me.

LOIS

That's not true. I told her that I'm just helping you move there. She did ask me if I thought that your being Jewish would lead you into temptation.

ANGIE

See?! I knew she didn't like me.

LOIS

She is just a mother, Angie, and mothers worry. Sorry. Does it bother you if I talk about her?

ANGIE

Because mine is dead? Why should it bother me?

LOIS

Because there's no one out there worrying about you.

ANGIE

That's not true. You worry.

LOIS

I guess it's my religion. I think Baptists worry harder than other people. I think my mother's been worrying about me since before I was born, and when I took this job, she was a nervous wreck. She kept saying "I know that boss of yours is up to no good." I might have listened sooner, but at least I didn't let it go too far.

ANGIE

What do you mean by that?

LOIS

I think that's why he let me go.

ANGIE

You mean he wanted more than* you would give?

LOIS

(finishing Angie's sentence as her own)

*...I would give! You know it Angie.

ANGIE

Holding out on him? You are the best, Lois!

LOIS

Don't crush my suit Ang'.

(1993: SARAH approaches DENISE who is reading a book.)

SARAH

Is this Track 9, the train to New York? The Minuteman? Oh my God, Denise? It's you!

DENISE

Sarah?

SARAH

You haven't changed a bit since high school. Can you believe it's been over ten years?

DENISE

Time flies.

SARAH

Can't -- they move too fast! You missed our reunion.

DENISE

I never went in for that sort of thing.

SARAH

What sort of -- Oh don't get up! You'll only make me feel short. Look at you. Thin. Appalling really -- don't you worry you have a tape worm or do you purge after meals?

DENISE

Are you really asking me to answer that?

SARAH

If there's a secret I want to know.

DENISE

Sarah, you look great.

SARAH

Do you think so? I get so nervous whenever I have to go into the city. I feel so suburban.

DENISE

You don't look suburban.

(1963: ANGIE and LOIS laugh together,
and the sound of the laughter makes
SARAH self-conscious.)

SARAH

Thank you. I tried. But you're a New Yorker now?

DENISE

Do you live here?

(1963: ANGIE lights a cigarette.)

SARAH

Not Center City. In Haverford. Want to see?

(SARAH waves away the smoke from
ANGIE's cigarette.)

DENISE

Well, --

SARAH

There's Martin -- we're married six years now. He's an accountant. That's our home, and our dog Pepper, and this is Isabelle. Almost four now, but there she's two. Boy am I glad she grew out of that. I really should keep these more up to date.

(coughing and again waving away the smoke)

Pepper had puppies. If you want one, I'll give you a discount. We try to sell them in pairs so they won't be lonely all day what with how busy everyone seems to be, but you're in New York, right? They probably won't let you have pets where you live, so it's moot, am I right?

DENISE

You're right. She's adorable.

SARAH

Thank you. You don't have to say that. Some people think Dalmatians are like accessories, to match your outfit, but actually they're wonderful dogs.

DENISE

I meant Isabelle, your daughter. She has beautiful eyes.

SARAH

Oh thank you, do you think?

DENISE

I do.

CONDUCTOR (off stage voice)

All aboard! Minuteman to New York, departing on Track 9.

SARAH

They're not my eyes. They're my grandmother's. I never saw them, I mean my grandmother died before I was born, but that's what I'm told.

DENISE

Listen, they're announcing the train.

SARAH

We named her for my grandmother, Isabelle. She died when my mother was only seventeen. Kind of boggles the mind, to lose your mother so young! It's just about the most awful thing I can think of. Don't you think? And my grandmother, the one who died so young, in her forties, she grew up without a mother at all, because her mother died of influenza while her father fought and died in the first world war. Can you imagine? She grew up an orphan. Lived through the Depression, and I think she almost starved to death, at least once.

LOIS

Do we have to ride in a car where everyone's smoking?

ANGIE

Most people smoke Lois.

LOIS

But on the train?

ANGIE

There aren't places to smoke and places not to smoke. It's just the way things are.

LOIS

But you don't have to do it the whole time, do you?

ANGIE

Fine. If I want to smoke, I'll just take a walk.

LOIS

It isn't a terribly long ride Angie. You can wait til we're there, can't you?

ANGIE

That's not the point.

LOIS

You're smoking now.

ANGIE

So? If we can find a Redcap, they'll take care of all this luggage.

LOIS

There should be traincars for smokers and traincars for people who don't want to ride in traincars full of smoke.

ANGIE

But everyone does it!

LOIS

I don't.

ANGIE

I already said I would smoke in another car.

LOIS

So then I'll just be sitting alone on the train. This was supposed to be a day for us to be together.

ANGIE

You can read my magazine with the article on Margaret Smith.

LOIS

Who?

ANGIE

You know, the tennis player? She beat Billie Jean Moffit at Wimbledon this year. She's from Australia.

LOIS

Oh, right.

ANGIE

How about I'll take two bags down and check them into the baggage car, and then we'll take the rest down together?

LOIS

Okay, I'll guard the luggage.

ANGIE

(exiting with bags, singing the 1963 hit by The Drifters)

"They say the neon lights are bright on Broadway..."

ANGIE AND LOIS

"on Broadway..."

(ANGIE exits.)

DENISE

I hope you don't mind but I ride in the smoking car.

SARAH

No, no.

DENISE

And they're going to get rid of smoking on Amtrak any day now, so each time I come in it's almost, well, it could be my last chance.

SARAH

Oh, I don't mind. My mother smokes. I mean, she used to, I mean, they won't let her now, but I grew up with it, you know, so I'm used to it.

DENISE

So I'll just --

SARAH

I'll ride with you in smoking. Unless of course you don't want me to. I mean if you're embarrassed...

DENISE

What?

SARAH

...or you want to finish that novel you were reading.

DENISE

No, not at all.

SARAH

Because I don't want to be a burden to you, Denise. I know what a burden is, and I don't want to be one. I said to Martin just the other day, if things ever get to be like this with me, if you ever feel that, well I couldn't stand it, I mean my mother. She's dying. She's driving us all insane with her dying, and it is taking so long. I know, I know it sounds terrible, but this running to the hospital all the time, I wish she'd just take to her bed, and we'd get her a nurse round the clock. But this barrage of possibilities, it's unnerving, you know what I mean?

DENISE

Um, no. Did you just say that your mother is dying?

SARAH

Isn't that what I said? I hope that's what I said. At home I have to watch my mouth. We're trying not to upset Isabelle with all of this. We don't want to put her in therapy any sooner than we have to.

DENISE

Sarah, my mother is dying too, and I would really * rather we don't discuss it.

SARAH

*Oh my God, Denise, your mother? Your mother, Madame Vel-LENN, that sweet, sweet woman who taught ballet? I am so sorry. And here I am just going on about my own -- and that's why you came to visit. Of course. So she has help now?

DENISE

I'd rather we talk about something else.

SARAH

Right. Well, is it cancer, cause ---

DENISE

I don't want to discuss it.

SARAH

Yes, okay. I can take a hint.

DENISE

I asked you politely.

SARAH

You don't have to snip at me. I'm not a poodle. I'm a bright woman, Denise. I'm doing the best I can.

DENISE

I'm sorry, it's just that.....

SARAH

I know. I know all about it. People see me coming, they run. You got stuck with me. Sitting here lost in some fantastic novel -- I never have time to read -- and you didn't see me coming. I wasn't trying to trap you. I didn't even recognize you until you looked up to answer me. I just thought you were the best person to ask. Literate, well-dressed, not the kind of person who turns out to be a drug addict, not out to con some suburban housewife on her way to shop in the big city. I'm not shopping. I am going to see my mother at Sloan Kettering.

(Lights up on ANGIE in 1993 in her hospital bed.)

SARAH

(continuing)

I know, you're wondering why is my mother at Sloan Kettering when we have perfectly good hospitals right here in town, but my mother is a shopper, and she has found herself some snake oil doctor who says he can make her dance again, and she wants to believe. Oh I don't mean dance the way your mother could dance... I was only... it was just an expression.

ANGIE

(to SARAH in 1993)

You never knew I was a dancer. Lois and I studied together for years. Tap, jazz, ballet. I was better than she was. Oh, she had the best technique, but I had what counted: real showmanship and presence. I was going to make it big!

(ISABELLE enters in modern 2003 clothing with piercings and tattoos. ANGIE watches as ISABELLE moves through the station listening to music on earbuds in a world of her own.)

SARAH

(to DENISE)

So I'm dropping Isabelle at pre-school and running to the city to help pry my mother from the jaws of death when it could all be avoided if she wasn't so stubborn. Am I wrong? Is it cruel of me to want to live my own life while she dies? Is that why you're looking at me like that Denise?

DENISE

Who me?

SARAH

Cause I know we were never the greatest of friends but I always admired you.

DENISE

You did?

SARAH

Not just for being tall and thin, although that's reason enough, but you seemed, you still seem, so calm, so secure. I mean, here you are in the middle of the station, everyone rushing about while you are like an island. If I lifted your hat -- don't worry I won't -- I'd find palm trees and cool breezes across sand dunes, sunsets and pineapple rum drinks. I want to know about that Denise. If I sit with you in the smoking car, if I take my life in my hands for an hour and a half, if I pay you -- I could write you a check, maybe what I pay my shrink -- would you tell me how you do it? Please Denise. Will you?

CONDUCTOR (off-stage voice)

All Aboooooard!

DENISE

Sarah, I don't want your money.

SARAH

Oh thank God, cause my shrink costs* a fortune and --

DENISE

*Sarah, I am going to get on this train,

CONDUCTOR (off)

Traaaaack 9!

DENISE (continuing)

and you are going to get on this train, and we are not going to speak, either of us.

CONDUCTOR (off)

to New Yorrrrk's Penn Station!

DENISE (continued)

If you want to speak, you can sit with someone else in a different car. Not in my car.

CONDUCTOR(off)

Allll Abooooooard!

DENISE (continued)

I like you Sarah, I really do. And I don't want to hear how the whole world has heard that I was rude to you. I'm not interested and either is anyone else. I'm sorry your mother isn't well.

(DENISE exits to platform. SARAH bursts into tears and runs after DENISE.)

(ANGIE arrives to get the rest of the luggage with LOIS -- they exit with luggage together to platform although ANGIE would like to linger over ISABELLE.)

ISABELLE

My Mother is a straightjacket's lover
 so shaken/so nervous she can't focus on another
 where the curve is that's me, little baby in the corner
 looking for some love wond'rin' why I am forlorn
 than a regular kid/with a normal kind of mother/who knows what love is
 so I beat it to the city where I'll be hanging out
 with the people who are pretty people Daddy loves
 all the ladies come/in every kinda color not like the Main Line with the train line
 this empty hometown where I'm in lost & found I get the run around
 I wish I'd lose it Must unglue it/where life is so much duller
 than the running curse my Mother's worse/My Mother Verse

(SHE exits to platform.)

SCENE 3

(1963: Having stowed the bags, LOIS and ANGIE wait for the train on the platform while ANGIE finishes a cigarette. DENISE also waits for the train on her own.)

LOIS

It's so cold down here!

ANGIE

You want my wrap for your shoulders?

LOIS

No, I'm fine. Freezing, but fine.

ANGIE

Bracing. That's what my mother would have called it.

LOIS

You miss her, don't you?

ANGIE

I don't really think about it. I remember her when I remember her.

LOIS

So you think you're at peace with it?

ANGIE

Who's at peace? That's the kind of thing people say about the dead. I'm not dead.

LOIS

I didn't mean it like that. I don't see how you can go on smoking when your Mom died and --

ANGIE

Nobody dies of smoking, and even if she did, I'm not planning on quitting. It reminds me of her. It's like having her around.

LOIS

That's depressing.

ANGIE

Everything's depressing to you Lois. Maybe that's why your name is LOW-is. Because you're so low.

LOIS

Angie!

ANGIE

I'm not saying you don't have reason to be, having lost your boyfriend.

LOIS

He wasn't my boyfriend. He was my boss, and it's not like I lost my mother.

ANGIE

But you lost something, someone.

LOIS

He wasn't worth pining for, obviously.

ANGIE

So you're not low?

LOIS

I'm here, aren't I?

ANGIE

Ready to start again. Maybe you'll meet someone on the train, or later tonight when we go out. Anything's possible. I admire that Lois.

LOIS

No, you don't. You want what you want, which is not on the menu.

ANGIE

We are not discussing what I want. I didn't even bring it up.

LOIS

It's all around us, Angie.

ANGIE

Why, I don't have the slightest idea what you mean.

LOIS

Yes, you do. You have every idea. All kinds of ideas.

ANGIE

Well, if you put it that way, yes, I do have ideas. I am an imaginative person.

LOIS

Crazy, if you ask me.

ANGIE

Can we please have a nice time together, as best friends, the way we used to, before all this imagination came between us, please Lois? I was behaving myself.

LOIS

Yes, you are. And I do love you Angie, it's just --

ANGIE

You're worried about later at Carol's apartment -- no need to worry. I will be an angel. Besides, we wouldn't want to upset her. She's being so generous.

LOIS

And if she found out about you, she probably wouldn't want you to stay with her, so...

ANGIE

I am not a bad person.

LOIS

I didn't mean to suggest it, but Carol won't want that in her apartment, Angie.

ANGIE

Okay, okay, you made your point.

(2003: ISABELLE enters alone. ANGIE watches her.)

ISABELLE

I used to lose you, I would find myself afraid
like in department stores/or at the New Year's Day Parade
When I slipped out of your hand/and felt the crowd close you away,
I'd want to scream./I'd want to scream your perfect name
as much a part of you as me,/but part of me was like relieved
to feel the pressure leave my sleeves,/cause you were holding my tiny so tight
Yes you were holding my tiny so tight.

(The train arrives. 1993: SARAH walks by sobbing. Blinded by tears, she boards the train.)

CONDUCTOR (offstage voice)

ALLLLL ABOOOOAARRD!!!! The Minuteman to New York's PENN STATION!

(ANGIE and LOIS and DENISE board.)

ISABELLE

When you let go the empty hung cold in the air
the loss felt worse to me than when you used to pull my hair
or drag me round from here to there.
All grown up now I can do just as I please
I gotta place to go I'm getting started.
I'm the one today who let your tiny slip away,
so you can miss me now and feel so broken-hearted.

(The train lurches to leave as ISABELLE slaps the side of the train and boards it.)

SCENE 4

(2003: ISABELLE hides in the Smoking car which is behind the Non-Smoking car both headed toward New York City.)

(1993: DENISE sits in the Smoking car and reads her book. SARAH in Non-Smoking.)

(1963: Forward, in the Non-Smoking car, ANGIE and LOIS move to seats.)

LOIS

What I don't understand is why you had to bring everything with you. Carol's place is tiny, and you could always come home and get the rest later. When you have a place of your own.

ANGIE

I don't want to come home.

LOIS

Not even to visit?

ANGIE

You know I hate it.

LOIS

You say that, but you don't mean it.

ANGIE

New York will be my home from now on.

LOIS

You're just upset about your mother.

ANGIE

I am not. It's almost a year now anyway. How upset can a person be?

LOIS

Oh, I'd say pretty upset.

ANGIE

Well I'm never coming back here. I won't even think of it. I'll be too busy being famous.

LOIS

So that's why you had to take everything at once?

ANGIE

I need everything I packed.

LOIS

So you need everything from here, but you hate it here?

ANGIE

You know what I mean.

LOIS

I know that Carol will be mad. She hardly has enough room for her own stuff.

ANGIE

I won't be staying with her that long. I'll get a place of my own. As soon as I make it big.

LOIS

Oh.

ANGIE

I want to get the kind of place Holly Golightly had in Breakfast At Tiffany's.

LOIS

That was a dump!

ANGIE

Dumps can be charming. If I put up with loud pipes, a fire escape, and crazy neighbors, when I'm rich and famous I can say that I suffered. Not just because my mother died young. I'll deserve my fame and fortune and not go around feeling like a phony.

(1993: SARAH enters the Non-Smoking car from further forward toward the front of the train and sits near ANGIE and LOIS. SARAH re-applies her make-up. ANGIE mirrors SARAH's gestures and puts on make-up.)

CONDUCTOR (off)

Tickets, all tickets please!

ANGIE

Everything will be different in New York.

LOIS

It may take some time, Angie.

ANGIE

Oh I have plans. I'm going to be a Rockette first, so I can audition in the daytime and dance at night.

LOIS

Where? In a bar?

ANGIE

I will not! You want to come with me and be a dancer too?

LOIS

I am not moving to New York City.

ANGIE

Why not?

LOIS

It's dangerous, dirty and loud.

CONDUCTOR (off)

Tickets.

(1993: SARAH fumbles through her purse searching for the ticket.)

SARAH

I'm sorry. It was here a minute ago. Oh I know it was here. That's the thing about having a big bag. I can never find what I need when I need it. My mother always used to tell me that -- oh, I don't mean she won't tell me again, I just mean that it's something she often says. No, please, don't go yet. I mean, it's here somewhere. I'm sure it is. Any time I lose anything it feels so much worse than it is, I mean, a ticket isn't such a terrible thing to lose, but when you feel as if you can't even hold on to the people in your life who you love, a ticket becomes another thing you might lose, and this feeling of loss starts to pile up on top of me like heavy quilts on a humid night. I just want to kick everything off. Do you know what I mean? And kicking or lashing out, that seems to be the very opposite of holding things close or people close, and -- here it is!

CONDUCTOR (off)

Tickets!

LOIS

You have stars in your eyes.

ANGIE

So what if I do? I got to aim high now Lois, this is my big chance.

LOIS

I would like to dance too, but not there.

ANGIE

What will you do with your life?

LOIS

What I've always wanted to do, fall in love, get married and raise my children.

ANGIE

But what about your life?

LOIS

What do you mean my life?

ANGIE

What if you don't find Mr Right right away? What would you want to do to pass the time?

LOIS

That is not what you're asking me.

ANGIE

What do you mean by that?

LOIS

I mean you do not think of yourself as a way to pass the time.

ANGIE

Well, I didn't mean me... exactly...

LOIS

No. You are asking me something I can't answer. If you want to know what I'm going to do until I fall in love, well, I'm not exactly cut out for the typing pool, but I'll give it another try.

ANGIE

I can't imagine you sitting all day with the clack clack clack and taking letters.

LOIS

I'm sure there are employment opportunities for girls who like to dance, but that's not necessarily a good thing.

ANGIE

Well let's see... Nobody is sending you off to college. Nursing?

LOIS

Nursing school costs money too, and that involves blood and other bodily fluids.

ANGIE

But nurses get to be on their feet all day.

LOIS

That's a plus to you?

ANGIE

You could be a dancing nurse.

LOIS

I do not want to nurse.

ANGIE

Librarians sit and shush people.

LOIS

No thanks.

ANGIE

Stewardess?

LOIS

Too racy! Plus, my mother would complain.

ANGIE

Waitressing?

LOIS

Waitressing is hard work, and I can do it, but I'd rather not.

ANGIE

Teachers have good hours.

LOIS

But I can't afford to get certified right now, and the private schools don't pay very much.

ANGIE

How about being what you are?

LOIS

What does that mean? What am I?

ANGIE

A dancer!

LOIS

Gee, thanks.

ANGIE

What? You are.

LOIS

I thought you were going to tell me I was something else.

ANGIE

All I was trying to say is that you can be more than a housewife with kids and a man to take care of everything. I am not here to live the life my mother did. Every day of her life was the same. Get up and take care of somebody else, cook and clean up and go to bed to do it all again. Why, she was hardly better than a maid.

LOIS

You sure sound angry at her for dying.

ANGIE

You can't be angry at people for dying.

LOIS

Why not?

ANGIE

It doesn't make any sense.

LOIS

Who says it has to make sense?

ANGIE

You know what I want Lois? I want to be in the middle of Times Square when the ball drops every year. And every week I'll ride to the top of the Empire State Building just to watch the skyline change.

LOIS

You think what I want is demeaning.

ANGIE

I'm just saying I got big plans, bigger than anything my mother ever dreamed of. Come.

LOIS

You think there's something wrong with wanting to have children, a house and a husband?

ANGIE

That's not what I meant.

LOIS

She might have found something else, once your brothers were grown.

ANGIE

Maybe, but it all happened so fast, you know?

LOIS

I remember your Mom, and I remember her being really happy. Maybe she didn't want more.

ANGIE

And the moon is made of green cheese.

LOIS

Ever since we were little, we've named our babies and tried to figure out who we might marry, and just because we weren't the first two girls with rings after high school doesn't mean we stop wanting that.

ANGIE

You did all that imagining. I just went along. Plus things are different now. Even if you do end up married with children, you could do something else first. I don't mean me. I mean anything you want. You could even have regular sex and take the pill.

LOIS

No doctor is going to prescribe that for unmarried girls.

ANGIE

They will if you make up some symptoms. If you say you're having trouble, they'll give it to you.

LOIS

I don't know where you come up with these ideas.

ANGIE

They're not just ideas, Lois. They are the future, and I come up with them, because I am searching for a new way to make my life. I don't want to end up like my mother.

LOIS

You mean married with children or dying so young? Cause I don't blame you for the second part. But running off to New York City --

ANGIE

I am not running off.

LOIS

I don't think you know what you want.

ANGIE

Tell me you've never done anything in your life before without considering the consequences?

LOIS

You don't mean that.

ANGIE

I'm sorry. I take it back. Come to New York with me.

LOIS

And be a Rockette? Oh no. I'm not a girl in a bikini kicking in a line to show off my derriere.

ANGIE

They don't wear bikinis.

LOIS

I love dance as a way to feel balanced in the world, as a way to be poised and at ease. I love the discipline of it, the form, and I think it's great training. But dancing on a stage in New York?

ANGIE

We can make it in New York!

LOIS

You will make it Angie. I'm sure you can. But I don't want to move to New York.

ANGIE

Then don't. No one's forcing you.

LOIS

No, of course not. I'm sure you'd never expect me to go from a break-up straight into another person's arms.

ANGIE

No, of course not.

LOIS

Not without grieving first.

ANGIE

Very funny Lois. You said yourself he isn't worth it.

LOIS

Doesn't mean I can't feel my loss.

ANGIE

Grief is a waste of time. Put on some lipstick and look around. There might be a great guy right here on this train ready to marry you, buy you a house and have three kids and a dog.

LOIS

Not interested, Angie.

(ANGIE gets up to look around as SARAH gets up to move to the Smoking Car.)

ANGIE

Oh yes, there are many possibilities out here. You should see them all.

LOIS

It wouldn't matter if he was in the next seat, Angie. I am licking my wounds.

(ANGIE returns to LOIS.)

ANGIE

I'll be your shoulder to cry on.

LOIS

I appreciate that, Angie.

(2003: ISABELLE comes out of her hiding place to take a seat.)

(1993: DENISE sits alone in the Smoking car with her book. SARA, re-composed, enters searching for DENISE. When SARAH sees DENISE, SARAH opens her mouth to speak, remembers DENISE's request and closes her mouth. Like a mouse, SARAH slips in the seat beside DENISE. DENISE looks up.)

(SARAH smiles and puts her fingers to her lips. DENISE goes back to her book.)

(SARAH tries not to speak. SARAH looks out the window. SARAH looks at DENISE.)

(2003: ISABELLE walks through the car.)

ISABELLE

Can't stop this train, Can't stop this leaving
 Can't stop don't got God's weight to stop a train.
 Traveling torched. Traveling torched. Traveling torched.

(ISABELLE repeats the last line until she exits to the space between the two cars.)

(1993: SARAH looks at DENISE who knows SARAH is watching her and pretends to read.)

(SARAH takes out the Sunday Times Crossword and a pen. DENISE relaxes and starts to read again.)

SARAH

A six letter word for hurt.

DENISE

Marred.

SARAH

Thank you. You are good at this. That's perfect.

(SARAH remembers she is supposed to be quiet. SHE zips her lips.)

SARAH

Sorry. I won't talk again.

(DENISE is furious with herself and burrows further in to her book in an attempt to ignore SARAH.)

(2003: ISABELLE is in the space between two cars. SHE stands facing the past.)

ISABELLE

Throw Mama from the train a kiss!

(SHE does, laughs, facing straight out, the present.)

ISABELLE

Slipping past the past// The ticket takers tocking out
The clocking of the train// Track minutes traveling
traveling traveling torched.

(facing the future)

Something silver slips off your finger/Like mercury, quick poison, or a memory,
your marriage to my mother./But I am not my mother.
And Mercury's a God, like you to me,/he watches over travelers, sheep and thieves.
Believe it. Traders, inventors of weights and measures,/unraveling sweaters,
my measurements increase/but I can hide this. I am slippery.
So what if your marriage ran away, got lost/among the physics of the stars tossed
instead of being locked up in her jewelry box/undreamed in her face cream jars
cause you were running too in cars to bars. Please let me stay with you.

(ISABELLE enters the Non-Smoking car
and walks past ANGIE and LOIS.)

ISABELLE

Can't stop this train
Can't stop this leaving

(ANGIE stands up.)

LOIS

Where are you going?

ANGIE

I gotta smoke.

LOIS

Well don't take forever.

ISABELLE (continuing)

Can't stop don't got
God's weight to stop a train.

Traveling torched.
Traveling torched.
Traveling torched...

(ANGIE walks to the Smoking Car and sits
near SARAH and DENISE. ANGIE lights
up.)

(ISABELLE walks the opposite way to the
end of the Non-Smoking Car. SHE exits
into the connective space between cars,
facing forward.)

ISABELLE

Don't take forever. What takes forever? A thief?
 Can forever be taken forever and ever?
 Is it heavy? Could I haul it in a purse?
 Don't got no purse,
 Don't got no bags,
 Don't got no Got no
 God's weight to stop a train.

(SHE faces the past and holding the silver
 handrail sticks her foot out into the wind.)

ISABELLE

Walking out the door with nothing to give me away
 When you need a way to get a way to get a way. Goodbye!
 Throw Mama from the train a kick!

(SHE kicks and loses her clog. SHE
 laughs.)

ISABELLE

Once clog missing/One clog one bag of clothes
 One toothbrush one dumb apartment with the nightlight down the hall
 one bulletin board with the comics impaled
 one clog and one cable tv/and one long trail of microwave dinners
 and no more Pepper-dog and no more pups
 and no ideas to make us rich/just put on a blouse and a lawsuit with pumps
 and a failure to be curious/and a failure to be bright
 and a failure to sleep through the night
 and one C+ and one back of a hand against my screwed up face
 and one C- and one back of a hand on my butt
 and no more private school your father's left us
 and no more lah-dee-dah your father's left us
 and all you do is listen to no sugar tonight in my coffee
 over and over and no more sugar tonight in my tea
 and nobody does it better than me --
 and is she gonna jump? Is she? Is she?

SARAH

Oh no. Oh my God.

(ISABELLE pulls herself back inside and
faces the present.)

DENISE

Is something wrong?

ISABELLE

Not looking back.

SARAH

I lost my ticket.

ISABELLE

Never.

SARAH

I mean my receipt.

ISABELLE

Looking back is not the way to go.

SARAH

I'll be back in a minute.

(SARAH goes to find her receipt.)

ISABELLE

Ticking minutes tocked to the station stops
And jars and stars and stops and starts
And oh how I wish I had a dog to miss.

(SARAH doesn't find her receipt and walks
back toward DENISE.)

(ISABELLE slaps the side of the train and
enters the train.)

(DENISE reads her book. SARAH sees
ISABELLE.)

SARAH

You stole something from me.

ISABELLE

I don't know what you're talking about.

SARAH

Give it back or I'll tell the Conductor.

ISABELLE

So tell him.

DENISE

No one is going to bother over the receipt. Here, take mine.

SARAH

Thank you Denise, but you don't have to. I mean, I know she did it. Just look at her.

DENISE

Please just take it.

(SARAH takes it and sits. ISABELLE sits.
ANGIE lights a cigarette off her other
cigarette. SARAH opens the crossword.)

SARAH

A three letter word for enlightenment.

DENISE

I'm reading.

SARAH

Denise, do you know a *three letter word for enlightenment?

DENISE

*If I find one, I'll let you know.

SARAH

Couldn't we maybe talk a little bit? Sometimes talking helps.

DENISE

What do you want to talk about?

SARAH

Anything. Your life. Are you married? Okay, I know you're not married. Are you dating?

DENISE

Sarah --

SARAH

Okay, you don't want to talk about that. Do you work?

DENISE

Yes, I edit children's books.

SARAH

Oh. Well that's wonderful. Do you love it? You must love it.

DENISE

Yes, I love it.

SARAH

You don't sound like you love it. Is it exciting? It sounds exciting.

DENISE

Yes, it's exciting.

SARAH

Any books I would have heard of? I have a daughter you know. Any books you could recommend?

DENISE

Yes. I just finished working on *Chicken, The Fraidy Cat*. It's about a Cat named Chicken who's afraid of everything and how he gets over his fears.

SARAH

Oh I get it. Sort of like a neurotic cat!

DENISE

Yes, a neurotic cat.

SARAH

So how does Chicken do it?

Do what?
DENISE

Get over his fears!
SARAH

DENISE
You should buy the book. It's much nicer to read it than to hear me explain. And Isabelle will enjoy it. It's her age group.

SARAH
A neurotic cat. Okay, I'll buy it. See how easy I am? You made a sale. Do you make enough to live on as an editor of children's books? I know how expensive it is in the city, and I don't want to pry or anything, but you were never, well, your family was never...

DENISE
I'm fine. My family is fine. We're all fine.

SARAH
Well obviously that isn't true. Your mother is dying, and I know your Dad was never --

DENISE
Sarah, I said I was fine. I'm fine.

(ISABELLE whispers under SARAH and DENISE as if she is a percussive instrument and then exits.)

SARAH
It sounds to me like you got a little bit of denial going on here. I mean --

ISABELLE
Can't stop this train
Can't stop this leaving
Can't stop Don't got
God's weight to stop a train

(ANGIE, watching ISABELLE, gets up and exits to go sit beside LOIS.)

DENISE

Sarah, do you remember when we were in high school and Karen Klinger lost her mother?

SARAH

You mean when Karen Klinger's mother ran away, cause it's not the same to lose your mother of her own free will. I mean, I'm not trying to say it wasn't totally tragic for Karen, but it's not as if her mother died. There's a difference you know.

ISABELLE continuing

Traveling torched.
Traveling torched.

Can't stop this train
Can't stop this train
Can't stop Don't got
God's strength to stop a train

Traveling torched.
Traveling torched.

(ISABELLE can repeat her last lines until she has exited to the silver space outside.)

DENISE

Okay, look, forget it. Forget I brought it up.

(ANGIE joins LOIS.)

ANGIE

Here I am: The Guiding Light. This is my look of concern. Here's shock. Horror. What do you think?

LOIS

You want to do soap opera too?

ANGIE

What's wrong with soap opera?

LOIS

Twenty minutes ago you were going to be a movie star. At this rate, by the time we get to New York, you'll be dreaming of making smut films.

ANGIE

I will not. I will make a good living Lois. You'll see.

LOIS

Okay, what do you say to a strange man who asks for your number?

ANGIE

I don't speak to strangers.

LOIS

Good.

ANGIE

I will work on finding work and getting a nice place in case you ever decide to visit. And I was just thinking of my mother and how she used to love to watch *The Guiding Light*.

LOIS

So what do you do when someone offers to help carry your groceries?

ANGIE

Let him help! What is this, *Twenty Questions*?

LOIS

Just asking.

ANGIE

Well, I wasn't planning on having any groceries.

LOIS

Then what are you going to eat?

ANGIE

I was hoping to go out to eat.

LOIS

Every night?

ANGIE

Maybe.

LOIS

I'm talking about before you make it big, you know, for the next few weeks.

ANGIE

I can afford to go out to dinner for a few weeks, but I don't think it will take that long, do you?
And I'll have dates too, with agents and producers, you know, meetings.

LOIS

What do you do if ---

ANGIE

Lois, why are you doing this?

LOIS

I worry about you Angie.

ANGIE

Doesn't that tell you something?

LOIS

What?

ANGIE

You're going to miss me.

LOIS

I never said I wouldn't.

(2003: ISABELLE in the silver space facing
the past.)

ISABELLE

Suffer Mother suffer from a sickness call it life.

Future future how many sutures?

Symptoms of life: breathing, hunger, cavities, itches, dandruff, laundry and zits.

Terminal terminus where the bend, spent and twisted at the end?

Causes of life: gestation, birth, being slapped, and eating.

Cures: none. Curses: many. Monthly many monthly many men.

Alleviation of pain? Under control Traveling torched. Traveling scorched.

Someone gonna get what they need some way some how on some kinda speed.

(1993: SARAH sees the sign that runs the
length of the Trenton Bridge.)

SARAH

"Trenton Makes, The World Takes." What does that mean?

DENISE

Aspirin. That's what I heard anyway. Trenton used to make aspirin.

SARAH

Who takes aspirin?

DENISE

Everyone used to, I guess.

SARAH

You don't smoke, do you?

DENISE

Never did.

(2003: ISABELLE leans out into the air in
between the cars.)

ISABELLE

You're the always who I can never comfort trust
cause the never is the what jumping off that's real to me
cause the never is the only thing I travel torched to see
and even with you gone, or me, no matter how hard I try,
with or without fleas, I'll still be scratching.

(SHE throws her other clog off the train.
SHE is not impressed with its landing.)

ISABELLE

Can't even fall trawling off right, can you?
Beat up shit! I shoulda been an abortion.
I suffer from a sickness, call it life, and yes, it's terminal.

(SHE goes to slap the train but instead
caresses it.)

CONDUCTOR (off)

Trenton! Trenton New Jersey!

(ISABELLE enters the train and hides.)

(SARAH struggles with crossword.)

SARAH

For a four letter word -- blank Canal -- I put Erie. So enlightenment starts with an E. EST? It can't be EST. My mother did EST once, you know, Werner Erhard? She came home talking about how extraordinary it is to stare at a strawberry, really stare at it, really see things, as if she had never taken the time before, and I remember thinking that when I grew up and had children of my own, I would take the time, and my daughter's already four, and I want to spend my life staring at her, but there's never any time, or I can't sit still, or I can't take her in. It's as if I am always yelling at myself in my own mind, as if even though my mother is dying, her voice is inside me berating me all day long. Maybe the canal is wrong. Do you know a different blank Canal?

DENISE

Birth?

SARAH

Four letters, that's five.

DENISE

Try Suez.

SARAH

Oh that works. That gives me the U, the S... I knew you could help me. Now I need the Z part. A three letter word for enlightenment that begins with Z. Zay, Zee, Zai, Zoh, Zoo.

(SARAH sighs. DENISE reads.)

LOIS

The thing that bugs me the most is how polite I was to him.

ANGIE

He was your boss.

LOIS

But I barely reacted. And I never stopped smiling. As if I was made of plastic.

ANGIE

I'm sure I would have done the same.

LOIS

No you wouldn't, Angie, you are made of fire.

ANGIE

You think?

LOIS

I know you, Angie. On Friday, I put on my smartest suit, you know the powder blue one?

ANGIE

Oh that's darling!

LOIS

And I did my hair. He asked how I was feeling, and I smiled and said, never better, thank you! What was I thinking?

ANGIE

That you could show him, that's what!

LOIS

Not even close. At five o'clock he says, Lois honey, will you come in here for a minute? And I thought, here we go again,

ANGIE

Oh no!

LOIS

but when I got there, he says, I'm going to have to let you go,

ANGIE

Just like that?

LOIS

as if he'd been carrying me for a decade down a long, hot road.

ANGIE

I think I might have smacked him.

LOIS

See? I wish I'd thought of that. But I was in shock. He offered me a shot of scotch. Can you imagine? Fired and going home with scotch on my breath! I said, no thank you. So polite.

ANGIE

Good job! You don't want to burn any bridges.

LOIS

I wouldn't mind burning his.

ANGIE

Are you letting him get you all worked up again?

LOIS

Better I should get angry than sit around feeling blue all the time.

ANGIE

Well I can't argue with that.

LOIS

I said, I would like a letter of recommendation for my next employer. And he said certainly.

ANGIE

Well that's good.

LOIS

No, just wait.

ANGIE

No.

LOIS

I said could you mail that to my home, and he said, whatever I wanted. He handed me my paycheck, and I said "good-bye," just like that, "good-bye," like I was filled with joy. Why was I so polite?

ANGIE

That's just manners, Lois. Don't be angry at yourself for that.

LOIS

I think I'd rather be nasty.

ANGIE

You were a lady. Through and through.

LOIS

But that letter never came. I should have typed it up myself and made him sign it before I left.

(SARAH is stuck. SHE tries not to talk.)

SARAH

Wouldn't it be nice to have a support group for daughters? Only daughters in the process of losing their mothers. Maybe we could start one. How often do you come in?

DENISE

No.

SARAH

That wasn't a yes or no question, Denise. How often do you come in?

DENISE

I am not joining your support group.

SARAH

I don't even have a support group. I was just saying --

DENISE

I am not starting a support group with you, Sarah.

(ANGIE moves to the Smoking car and lights up.)

CONDUCTOR (off)

Metropark! Station Stop: Metropark!

SARAH

I think you are very, very upset about your mother's death, and you don't want to deal with it.

DENISE

You don't know anything about me or my mother.

SARAH

I know she practically killed herself raising you. If she hadn't started that ballet school you would have starved or gone on welfare, cause your father never worked* a day in his life.

DENISE

*How dare you!

SARAH (continuing)

You must be losing your mind trying to figure out how to make her more comfortable when you can't even afford a nurse.

DENISE

You have no right to talk this way about my family.

SARAH

And she's not in any of the hospitals cause something like that doesn't happen on the Main Line without me knowing it.

DENISE

You don't know everything.

SARAH

I try to. I am usually up on all of these sorts of things.

DENISE

You might be up on all your fancy friends, but my mother and I are not even on your radar.

SARAH

That is completely untrue. I have always felt close to your mother, and by extension to you.

DENISE

You didn't grow up with her.

SARAH

I started her ballet classes when I was three years old.

DENISE

That doesn't mean you knew my mother.

SARAH

Of course I knew her. She was the reason I majored in French!

DENISE

French isn't even her first language.

SARAH

So? She was an inspiration!

DENISE

She was a fake who pretended to speak French.

SARAH

She was glamour and poise and grace personified.

DENISE

She worked like a dog.

SARAH

To support you.

DENISE

She left me to eat dinner alone every night at the reception desk while she plie-d herself to death.

SARAH

Madame Vel-LENN, I loved that woman.

DENISE

Are you saying that I didn't -- I mean don't?

SARAH

She was the only person who was ever nice to me my whole life.

DENISE

I spent my life watching her smile and beam at all the rich kids like you.

SARAH

Even when I was a klutz.

DENISE

Walking to the studio every day after school, not one of you ever offered me a ride.

SARAH

I could never keep up,

DENISE

In your satin slippers,

SARAH

and she had to keep me out of the advanced class three years in a row,

DENISE

tights without ladders,

SARAH

all that time she never made me feel like a klutz,

DENISE

perfect pink tutus,

SARAH

even when she told my mother I should take extra time mastering the early steps before moving on to advanced work, as if the coordinated girls didn't deserve to be as well-trained as I did.

DENISE

You didn't watch your mom wear some phony accent and wonder where is my mother and why doesn't anyone else hear her the way I do?

SARAH

I know your mother! I would do anything for that woman!

DENISE

You didn't sweep up after each class while mother after mother came to pick up their prima ballerinas.

SARAH

I will mourn her when she passes.

DENISE (continuing)

You think you know my mother? You weren't the one she locked to her side day and night. You didn't do your homework in a dance studio so you wouldn't have to be home alone with your dad, cause when Your dad was home, your mother was there to protect you.

SARAH

Oh no, Denise. You mean your father...? * I can't imagine.

DENISE

*She isn't your mother, she's mine. And I can mourn her any way I like. And -- she isn't even dead yet!

SARAH

But of course that makes perfect sense.

DENISE

Sense? This makes sense to you?

SARAH

Of course she kept you at her studio all the time.

DENISE

Forget it. Forget I ever * said anything. Forget you ever saw me.

SARAH

Who knows what your home life was like? I mean your father wasn't exactly Mr. Rogers. I mean, I'm sorry, but it's incredible how hard she must have tried to protect you.

DENISE

Stop it.

SARAH

She was like a saint, and when she dies, I will walk into Bryn Mawr Presbyterian and light candles.

DENISE

Presbyterians don't have saints!

SARAH

Well I'm Jewish, and we don't have saints either, but nothing seems to work on the Main Line unless you do it the wasp way.

DENISE

We're Baptist.

SARAH

So we're almost related!

DENISE

You don't know me. We are strangers who attended the same high school.

SARAH

How can you say that?

DENISE

Because it's true.

SARAH

It is not. You just want to wave the world away, ignore everything you've been through. Read your novel.

DENISE

It's not a novel and I'll beat you to death with it*, if you don't shut up and leave me alone!

SARAH

*Oh my God. I'm sorry. I went too far.

DENISE

I'll just go. I'm going.

SARAH

I'm torturing you. I'm torturing Martin. I'm probably raising a schizophrenic child the way I act.

DENISE

Sarah, what did you say?

SARAH

Please, forgive me. I should be shot. Hung. Drawn. Quartered. Run out of town on a rail. I hate my life.

DENISE

No, what you said a minute ago.

SARAH

I'm a terrible mother? A terrible person?

DENISE

No, the thing about my mother making me work, so I wouldn't have to go home.

SARAH

I don't know. I just talk. You shouldn't listen to me Denise. No one else does.

DENISE

You think my mother was trying to protect me?

SARAH

Denise, I'm so glad your mother is dying. I know, I know, it's a terrible thing to say, but I can cry for your mother. I can't cry for my own.

DENISE

I'm sorry.

SARAH

No, please, don't be. It's all my fault.

DENISE

Well, yes, it is, but still...

(DENISE and then SARAH look out the window. ISABELLE moves from hiding to sit by ANGIE.)

ANGIE

My mother used to tell me stories about New York City. The musicals on Broadway, the dancers in the nightclubs and Radio City Music Hall, the works. She said, you can get up there and dance and sing and act just as good as the rest of them. I used to take the local train into Center City just to practice, to see what it would be like, to live in a big city. Stare at the Walnut Street Theatre. I know Central Park is a lot bigger than Rittenhouse Square, but I'm ready.

(ANGIE lights a cigarette.)

ANGIE

I smoke just like her.

(ANGIE inhales deeply on the cigarette and blows out a large plume of smoke.)

ANGIE

That's life. Right there in front of me, where I can see it and watch it rise.

(ANGIE takes a drag on the cigarette.)

ANGIE

I feel it, going into me, becoming a part of me, and then I can feel myself let it go. So that every time I smoke I get to practice letting go.

(ANGIE takes a final drag.)

ANGIE

Because letting go is the hardest part.
(to the smoke, to her mother)
Goodbye.

ANGIE (cont'd)

(to ISABELLE)
So what do you think? Should I be a movie star?

(ISABELLE nods. ANGIE puts her
cigarette out.)

ANGIE

Don't start any habits you can't break. You're young. And they say it stunts your growth. But you're pretty tall already. You got long legs. Five foot five and a half or taller, you can be a Rockette. If you can dance. Do you know that? I'm going to be a Rockette!

(ISABELLE kicks her leg up to show she
can dance. ANGIE sees her feet.)

ANGIE

Crazy, you have no shoes!

(ISABELLE nods/shrugs.)

ANGIE

Do you know that you have no shoes?

(ISABELLE nods/shrugs.)

ANGIE

Well that's not right.

ISABELLE

One fell off, got tossed, lost and lost and so much lost, so...

ANGIE

I have shoes. I've got all my stuff up there. Come on.

(ISABELLE doesn't move. ANGIE tries to
take her by the hand.)

ANGIE

You can't walk around barefoot.

CONDUCTOR (off)

Newark, New Jersey! Newark New Jersey!

(ISABELLE won't let ANGIE touch her.)

ANGIE

What's your name? I am so sorry. I would never --

ISABELLE

I can't go in there.

ANGIE

What do you mean?

ISABELLE

The conductor's in there.

ANGIE

So? You don't have a ticket.

ISABELLE

I am anti-establishment.

ANGIE

What's that?

ISABELLE

An establishment is like an edifice. It isn't hit or miss. It is the thing that is.
 A large building like a bank. And the bank is like a block
 that keeps its own clock, tick and tock stop there,
 so you don't have to think or care / the why you do the what you want,
 it's all apparent from the talk, the ones who want you to think
 the way they say, the what you do, it follows, like a wheel that rolls, we're hollow
 cause we never choose the culture that we're leveraged in,
 unless we do, and once we learn to choose instead of being part
 of what gets used that makes us anti-establishment.

ANGIE

I'm sorry. What?

ISABELLE

The establishment is already established. To be against it is to be against what already is, and I'm for change. How come you don't know anything?

ANGIE

I know things. I'm a dancer.

ISABELLE

Body knowledge. That's cool.

ANGIE

My shoes aren't in there anyway. All my luggage is checked into the baggage car. When we get to New York, I can give you a pair of shoes then.

ISABELLE

I might not make it to New York.

ANGIE

What? Oh my God, don't move. Let me think.

ISABELLE

What's there to think about?

ANGIE

You. I can't let anything happen to you.

ISABELLE

You don't even know me.

ANGIE

Even more reason. Strangers. And what is New York City if it's not a big place full of strangers, and if strangers can't help strangers, then we're just like animals.

ISABELLE

Easy to help strangers. Harder to help yourself, or the people you love.

ANGIE

If the people you love get sick, there's nothing you can do. They die and --

ISABELLE

That's not what I meant.

ANGIE

Okay, well, you look so much like my mother, it's as if ...

ISABELLE

Your mother? She must be a fossil.

ANGIE

Well not quite. I meant it nicely, as in you don't feel like a stranger.

SARAH

Denise, I just want to say thank you. Thank you.

DENISE

You're welcome.

SARAH

Do you know why I'm thanking you?

DENISE

No.

SARAH

Do you mind if I tell you?

DENISE

Go ahead Sarah. Tell me.

SARAH

I've been so worried that I won't be able to cry for my mother, that people will see me as a cold ungrateful daughter, that my father will never speak to me again, but I know now how to get through this. I can cry for the mother I never had. I can cry for her.

(DENISE puts her hand on SARAH's hand.)

ANGIE

How did you lose your shoes?

ISABELLE

Clogs.

ANGIE

Like they wear in Holland?

ISABELLE

Are you looking for some kind of existential type of answer?

ANGIE

I was just wondering.

ISABELLE

When I was four years old, my mother had a nervous breakdown in the shoe department at Lord & Taylor's.

ANGIE

(with her own shoes)

That's where these are from. I know the feeling.

ISABELLE

She was screaming about some shoes her mother had. Her mother had just died. She started to cry. The Lord & Taylor people called an ambulance that took her to Bellevue. When she was allowed to come home again, my father divorced her and moved to New York City, and I got sent to therapy three days a week.

ANGIE

When I was four, my mother had another baby. I have two older brothers and three younger brothers. All they ever did was tease me or spit up on me, and all I ever wanted to do was dance.

ISABELLE

I took dance too, but that's not important.

ANGIE

But it could be important. You're young yet. You never know. Dance is the sort of thing you'll be glad you have to fall back on! It must be awful to live with a crazy woman.

ISABELLE

She's mostly fine now.

ANGIE

But didn't you say she's divorced?

ISABELLE

Everyone's divorced.

ANGIE

Everyone where? In your family?

ISABELLE

In the world, duh. She is trying to become enlightened by meditating and chanting and practicing a lot of yoga. I'm almost fourteen, I kicked my clogs into the Meadowlands. I am pregnant and I keep thinking I might jump off, you know? Is that what you wanted to know?

ANGIE

Don't jump. You're already headed to New York and they have places there where they can do stuff, about being pregnant, you know, better than the ones in Philadelphia. Up in Harlem. And one in Brooklyn Heights I think. Is that why you're?

(ISABELLE shrugs.)

ANGIE

You have my mother's eyes.

ISABELLE

Are you trying to come on to me, cause if you are, that's a really bad line to use, and I'm not into women, okay?

ANGIE

My mother died last year.

ISABELLE

That's deep. I'm sorry. If that happened to me, I would definitely jump off this train or maybe if that happened to me, I would just curl up and die.

ANGIE

I -- I -- well, no I never actually did anything like that, you know, you just keep going. I mean, life just -- I mean, my Dad wouldn't want me to... You aren't serious are you?

ISABELLE

I just don't want to be pregnant.

ANGIE

I can understand that. But you are awfully young to be having sex. Do you love him?

ISABELLE

I didn't have sex with anyone.

ANGIE

Then why do you think you're pregnant?

ISABELLE

Because I'm late, and I feel bloated, and -- do you mean that's the only way it happens?

ANGIE

Pregnancy? Yes. It happens from sex.

ISABELLE

Well, I knew that, I just thought there might be other ways.

ANGIE

Like, what other ways?

ISABELLE

Um, kissing?

ANGIE

No. Boy puts his you know in a girl's ...

ISABELLE

That's it?

ANGIE

That's it. Of course there are other ways to have sex, if that's what you mean, but they don't make you pregnant.

(The New York City skyline arrives before them.)

ANGIE

Oh look!

ISABELLE

God, I just love New York.

ANGIE

Isn't that the most beautiful skyline?

ISABELLE

Beautiful as in cry your eyes out?

ANGIE

Beautiful as in joy, as in hope, as in the future.

ISABELLE

To me, the New York City skyline is tragic.

ANGIE

But it's all upward reach, push and thrust and --

ISABELLE

Can you stop with all the sex talk? The towers are gone and they're not coming back.

ANGIE

The towers?

ISABELLE

I was eleven when they fell. At school. We were all sent to the gym in a kind of end of the world panic. I hadn't made any friends. And the teachers just left us there and went to the break room to watch it on TV. They sent in updates, like when the second plane hit.

ANGIE

Hit what?

ISABELLE

Imagine out there two towers, so tall they reach beyond everything else you can see. One hundred and ten stories each.

ANGIE

That's impossible. The Empire State Building is the tallest building in the whole world with one hundred and two stories!

ISABELLE

Those towers made of steel looked like salt and pepper shakers
 sculptured silver slivers in the air/would have been smooth and cool to feel
 but now they're gone from there. Over and over they burst into flames
 The first one falls like a tree chopped down/so the boys at school would yell timber!
 At recess they'd run around holding they're ears
 screaming timber! timber! tip themselves over/until they'd fall and roll
 while the girls would be the north tower/second to fall,
 the second to fall only we didn't tip over like the boys.
 The north tower implodes in the quiet like a prayer
 We would each lift just one arm in the air
 That was our antennae on the top/but even with antennae we were unaware
 thought life would be fair/we'd collapse inside ourselves
 crushed down like a can of soda pop. Dig ourselves a hole in the blacktop
 Waiting for the whistle of the teacher when we'd stop
 Just end up fetal puddles, fetal puddles/ in piles of ash and rubble on the ground
 BSSSHHH!

ANGIE

It sounds horrible.

ISABELLE

Better than when I was four when my mother disappeared. Nobody tells four anything. They think four can't understand. Four will get upset. So they whisper, and four ends up hearing the made up mixed up with the truth. I thought she stabbed herself to death with a pair of stilettos. Where were you on 9/11?

ANGIE

I don't know anything about it.

ISABELLE

If you don't even know what's been lost, how can you grieve?

ANGIE

I didn't know I was supposed to.

ISABELLE

You are like a dry sponge.

ANGIE

What's like a dry sponge?

ISABELLE

Useless.

ANGIE

What is that supposed to mean?

ISABELLE

You have missed the whole point of living.

ANGIE

And you're here to enlighten me, Miss I-Didn't-Even-Know-How-To-Get-Pregnant a minute ago?

ISABELLE

If you want to know.

ANGIE

Okay, what makes me so useless in your eyes?

ISABELLE

Your mother's eyes, right?

ANGIE

Yes.

ISABELLE

So that counts for something.

ANGIE

Okay, what?

ISABELLE

You don't feel anything. You're all dried up.

ANGIE

You don't know that about me. Plus it's not even true. I have feelings, serious feelings. I happen to be deeply in love right now.

ISABELLE

You could have fooled me.

ANGIE

Take my shoes.

ISABELLE

Don't they go with your outfit?

ANGIE

I can wear something else.

ISABELLE

It's not that I don't want them,

ANGIE

They're almost brand new.

ISABELLE

but aren't they kinda retro?

ANGIE

From Lord & Taylor's. Oh, sorry. I don't mean to bring up bad memories. What size are you?

ISABELLE

Seven.

ANGIE

Good size. That's my size. Perfect dancer size.

ISABELLE

How do you walk in them?

ANGIE

Carefully. Take them. They'll look good. I don't understand the rest of you, but the shoes will look good. Please. I'll put them here. You can try them on. I'm sure they'll fit. I have a friend up there, and I should be getting back. You can come with me if you want.

ISABELLE

I can't. I told you.

ANGIE

You're not going to hurt yourself, are you?

ISABELLE

No more need, thanks to you.

ANGIE

Then I'll leave them for you. Put them on. And get home safe, will you?

(ANGIE exits toward LOIS but stops and turns back to see ISABELLE but ISABELLE is gone.)

ANGIE

And as I turned back to take a final look, to find her eyes, the Conductor took her by the wrist, and they struggled. She yelled out and cursed him, and I went up to him and said, you can't do that. I'll pay for her ticket! Did you hear me? I said I'll pay. I have cash. Hey! But the conductor didn't even see me or hear me, and the girl was gone.

I wanted to hold her, but you can't just grab hold of a stranger. I wanted to cry, but how could I cry there? I wanted to stop the train and turn around and go back home. I wanted to walk into the kitchen and see my mother wipe her hands on her apron happy to see me. I wanted to hold her and tell her I was sorry for judging her life, for thinking she was less, less than, I don't know, I never gave her any credit for the things she did, and it must have been hard for her, so hard she rotted away like I'm rotting away, only I never even came close to her as a mother. I failed you. I failed me too. I failed your father. Oh go already -- I'm too morbid to be with. You know what I did? I marched over to Lois and, and, and I added more lipstick to my smile.

DENISE

I know the word.

SARAH

What word?

DENISE

The three letter word for enlightenment. The Z works with Suez as in Canal.

SARAH

Oh, Denise, that's so kind of you. So what's the word?

DENISE

Zen. Z-E-N.

SARAH

Z-E-N. Perfect! Thank you. I knew you'd know a word like that. See how it works, now that I've got Zen, I can fill in all the rest. It all makes sense now.

DENISE

I know how crossword puzzles work Sarah.

SARAH

I'm sorry. Of course you do.

LOIS

You did what?

ANGIE

I had to. She was... well, you must've seen her, she passed by here. Humming. Talking to herself.

LOIS

I would have remembered that.

ANGIE

You didn't see her?

LOIS

Angie, how are you going to survive a day in New York City? You gave a stranger your shoes!

ANGIE

I have other shoes.

LOIS

In the baggage car. I'll have to get a Red Cap while you just find a seat on the platform. You'll get sick. It's all concrete and cold. What'll you do when I'm not here to take care of you?

ANGIE

Come with me!

LOIS

I am.

ANGIE

I mean stay with me.

LOIS

It's not my dream, Angie.

ANGIE

Even if I could pay for us to live together.

LOIS

What do you mean pay for us?

ANGIE

You could do whatever you wanted. You don't have to dance on a stage. You could go to art museums. You could dream.

LOIS

I don't know what you mean.

ANGIE

You know what I mean.

LOIS

My family is here.

ANGIE

This is the place where we'll get to be who we truly are.

LOIS

I'm taking a brief glimpse of the big city, and then I'll head for the hills!

ANGIE

You could have your own room. Your own bed. Your own anything. I just want to be nearby. I don't think you understand. In fact, I am pretty sure you don't know how I feel. I mean, I think you think that I have the kinds of feelings that have to do with things that no one ever talks about, but my feelings are not about that. They're about love, Lois. Serious, life-long true love. The kind people sing about. The kind people search for all their lives. And if I don't tell you the truth about it, you'll never know. You will just think I have strange ideas about what to do with you, and that's not what keeps me alive in this world. And here we are about to be in New York City where I am sure we could find places where what we have between us is not strange. Everything I want to do, I only want to do it for you. I want to make you as happy as you make me.

LOIS

I haven't done anything to make you happy.

ANGIE

And you won't ever have to. I'm happy just being near you.

LOIS

I'll be right back.

ANGIE

You're leaving?

LOIS

Just give me a minute, okay?

ANGIE

In that minute, I'll miss you. Why? Where are you going?

LOIS

I'm going to find your shoes.

(LOIS moves to the Smoking Car.)

CONDUCTOR (off)

In two minutes we'll be in New York's Penn Station. Final destination stop is New York's Penn Station!

DENISE

You know what you were saying before about mourning for a mother you never had.

SARAH

I'll never forget it, as long as I live, and that is thanks to you Denise. I am really hoping that you might want to come by* next time you're in, and --

DENISE

*Sarah, did you ever think it might be possible to have had the mother you wanted and not know it? Like maybe there was something you never understood, something you overlooked, a blind spot, and now that you see it, maybe it's possible to tell her, to apologize, for never seeing, for accusing her or hating her, to just let it go?

SARAH

No, not possible. I mean after trying to deal with her for years, my father, as a kind of graduation present after college, he * finally explained to me that I was

DENISE

*I wasn't talking about you, Sarah, but sure, just go on then.

SARAH (continuing)

the result of -- well -- what he called an "incident" which is his euphemism for rape, so I've always been like a stranger to my mother. Unwanted. Unwelcome. It's been a big part of my therapy.

DENISE

I'm sorry. Did you just say that your mother was raped?

SARAH

Yes. That's how she got pregnant with me. She wanted to be a dancer, but she moved back to Philadelphia and married my Dad instead.

(The train stops. THEY gather their things.)

CONDUCTOR (off)

New York's Penn Station!

SARAH

But of course we never talk about it, because it could kill her to know that I know.

CONDUCTOR (off)

New York's Pennsylvania Station!

SARAH (continuing)

Of course she's already dying, so would it matter? But I have to keep her secret. I'm proud of that.

CONDUCTOR (off)

Please take all of your belongings.

SARAH (continuing)

I promised my father.

CONDUCTOR (off)

This will be the last and final stop on this train.

SARAH (continuing)

Plus, I wouldn't want to open any old wounds,

CONDUCTOR (off)

New York's Pennsylvania Station!

SARAH (continuing)

not that my very presence isn't like a boil on her neck, so I try to be sensitive...

DENISE

Right. Well. Sarah. You might consider meditation.

SARAH

What do you mean, like Hare Krishnas?

DENISE

Um no. I mean like Zen.

SARAH

Zen?

DENISE

As in everything is connected.

SARAH

Zen.

DENISE

Thank you again, Sarah, and good luck to you.

SARAH

Are you late for work? Cause * it's barely nine-thirty, and

DENISE

*I've got to run.

SARAH (continuing)

if you want to share a taxi, I could leave you off --

DENISE

I'm going back to Philadelphia.

SARAH

That's funny. Sounded like you said you're going back to Philly.

DENISE

I did. I am. I have to find a payphone. I've got to call in sick and get another train. I have to see my mother!

(DENISE exits.)

SARAH

Me too. Thanks Denise. Good-bye.

(LOIS returns with ANGIE's shoes.)

LOIS

Here they are!

ANGIE

Thank you. But I wish she'd taken them.

LOIS

They go with your outfit. How could you give them away?

ANGIE

I wanted her to have them.

LOIS

But why would you give away your own shoes?

ANGIE

Because she... because... when I look at you Lois, I get this feeling, and, ...

LOIS

I think I may get a train back tonight.

ANGIE

But --

LOIS

Come on. Let's get your bags up to Carol's.

ANGIE

Please Lois, please...

LOIS

Who knows? The future is filled with possibilities. Maybe you'll find someone here. You never know. "All we have to do..."

LOIS and ANGIE

"...is dream..."

(LOIS exits. ANGIE and SARAH return to the hospital as before in 1993.)

SCENE 5

(1993: ANGIE's hospital room in New York City, as before. ANGIE goes to her bed and takes off her heels and her suitjacket and replaces it with her elegant robe and her oxygen tubing and finger monitor SARAH stands beside her. The oxygen bubbles up through a water cup for humidity as the heart monitor beeps a regular pattern.)

ANGIE

But after that I didn't dream.

SARAH

That's it? I don't understand. You wanted to tell me you never loved me? That you loved some strange girl on a train more than you ever loved me?

ANGIE

I'm not doing this well, Sarah. I'm trying to apologize.

SARAH

You're apologizing to me?

ANGIE

I should have given that love to you.

SARAH

It would have been nice.

ANGIE

I should have saved it for when you came along.

SARAH

I didn't realize there were limits on love. So you had nothing left to give. You never loved me.

ANGIE

No, I meant I never let myself love you. I was afraid. I became what she said, useless.

SARAH

You mean your heart broke? You mean, you wished that you loved me?

ANGIE

I said I would tell you my story, and you agreed to leave. It's time to leave Sarah.

SARAH

I know I agreed, but --

ANGIE

A deal is a deal, Sarah.

SARAH

What, you can't love anyone unless they're leaving you?

ANGIE

I should have given those shoes to you or made some random gesture, once, in kindness,

SARAH

A random gesture? This is what you regret? That you didn't make a random gesture?

ANGIE (continuing)

and now I'm like a rag, wrung out, nothing left, not that there was much to start with, but I'm running dry Sarah, and you have to go.

SARAH

I'm supposed to leave now?

ANGIE

We made a deal.

SARAH

I take it back.

ANGIE

You can't take it back.

SARAH

Okay mother, just let me figure it out for a minute.

ANGIE

There is nothing to figure out. I told you a story. You said you would leave.

SARAH

I know but --

ANGIE

Sarah, this is my chest tube. It goes into my back and drains out all the fluid that builds up in my lungs. If I rip it out like this

(rips it out)

I start to drown. Slowly, but inevitably. You see all the fluid in here?

(SHE holds up the box it was draining into
-- it is half-full of viscous pinkish-red fluid.)

ANGIE (continuing)

That's filling my lungs until I drown, so there won't be any reason for you to make another trip back here. Do you understand?

SARAH

No. I don't. Put it back.

ANGIE

I can't.

SARAH

Then call the nurse and make her put it back.

ANGIE

I told you, I signed the forms. They won't put it back.

SARAH

But that's barbaric.

ANGIE

That's what I want.

SARAH

Then what you're saying is that you are killing yourself just to prove some kind of point. You're making it my fault.

ANGIE

It's isn't your fault that I'm sick. Is that what you think?

SARAH

It's my fault you just pulled out your chest tube. If I wasn't here, you would have left it there to help you breathe.

ANGIE

Not necessarily. I said I was all dried up. Out of love. But maybe I'm drowning in it. Never knew how to let it out. Sucked it away. Cigarettes. Pushed it down. Never wanted to live, with a love no one wanted. But when I think of Lois, it overwhelms me. Easier to be mean, to push you away.

SARAH

But. It's not fair.

(ANGIE coughs/laughs. Without the tube, she has less and less air for speaking.)

ANGIE

I'm trying. To give you what you want. I know you want to be here. When I die. So you'll leave if I die. Yes?

SARAH

I don't get it, Mother. I never got anything right your whole life, and now I'm going to fail at this.

ANGIE

This isn't about you, Sarah.

SARAH

Why not? I'm the one losing my mother. You'll be dead soon. Why does it always have to be about you? I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

ANGIE

I need to rest.

SARAH

Okay, I'll go. I'll run over to Lord & Taylor's and buy myself my own shoes!

ANGIE

Go home Sarah. Your daughter expects you. Pick her up. At preschool.

(ANGIE arranges herself in the bed.)

SARAH

Wait. You loved Madame Vellen? You gave some stranger the shoes off your feet? Some runaway talking about towers that fell from the sky? This is supposed to make me feel better? This is the story that is supposed to make it okay for me to leave you? Some stranger with your mother's eyes?

I can't leave you. Even if I want to, and believe me, there are parts of me that would love to, I can't. I keep thinking that maybe the next time I fill your cup with ice, you'll tell me it's just the right amount, or if I could get your pillows right, you'll say, "thank you Sarah, that feels much better." It's not so much to ask, is it?

(SARAH looks at ANGIE to see her reaction, but ANGIE's eyes are closed as she struggles with her breath.)

SARAH

Of course you're asleep. Snoring. Do you know that you snore, oh special perfect one? I thought you might finally tell me about the "incident" and confess to having resented me all my life and ask me for forgiveness. Isn't that what dying people want? I'd give it. But I'd really like it if you'd ask me first. Mother?

(The oxygen hisses. The heart monitor beeps.)

SARAH

Okay, I said I would leave, and I will, but my therapist always says that we are the stories we tell ourselves. I tell Isabelle stories too. As if I believe I don't know how to get it right, but I bet I do. I bet. I am always bargaining with you, Mother. So I will leave you, just like Lois. That's your story. But what kind of daughter walks away when her mother is dying.? I want to get what I want this time, because it's my story too. So I get to be here when you die.

(The oxygen hisses. The heart monitor beeps.)

SARAH

This is the thing that regulates your oxygen, right? I'm turning it down. Do you hear me, Mother? I am sorry your heart was broken. But I am going to stop the story that says you didn't love me, that I couldn't be loved. Because what you meant was you didn't let yourself love me. There's a difference. You apologized to me. It didn't sound like much, but you tried. With some of your last words, you tried. So I don't need another pair of shoes.

(The oxygen hisses quieter, slower, as the heart monitor slows.)

SARAH

I can go home now and pick up Isabelle. I'll take her to the library -- she loves the library. They have these finger puppets there and dress-up costumes and big stuffed animals, and -- while she's busy in the children's corner, I'm going to find out what Denise meant when she said I should learn about Zen. Because I want to grieve for you. Mother. I'm right here beside you, and I'm holding your beautiful hand.

(SARAH removes the finger monitor and there is a long beep until SARAH turns off the machine. Silence. ANGIE pales to stone.)

END OF PLAY