

The Red Balloon
A play by
Matthew Gutschick

Personages

Mara, *an aging woman with increasing memory problems. A former poet.*

Lilly, *Mara's daughter. In her early forties.*

Sid, *Mara's husband. Also, he is dead.*

Nick, *Mara's husband. In his early forties.*

Underpass Prophet, *played by the actor playing Sid.*

Sully, *Around Mara's age. Played by the actor playing Sid.*

Decker, *A longtime boardwalk busker. Also played by the actor playing Sid.*

Topper, *an energetic and well-intentioned dog. Played by the actor playing Lilly.*

Place

A cookie-cutter suburban home, an underpass, a bucolic little park, a boardwalk, heaven.

Time

The present.

Lights up on Mara's room, which is in disarray. Clothes are strewn everywhere, furniture overturned. Lilly stands in the middle of this mess, apparently trying to remember something when Lilly enters with a load of laundry.

LILLY

Oh...my...Mom. Mom?

MARA

Oh, hi Lilly.

LILLY

What did you...Mom this is bad...this is really...bad.

MARA

What honey?

LILLY

Look at this...

MARA

Oh that...I know. Isn't it terrible?

(Mara starts picking through one of the piles.)

LILLY

What did you...Mom, this is our room...I mean-you can't do this in my house.

MARA

I know we're in your house Mara. I'm not blind. Just stupid sometimes.

LILLY

Stop.

(She does.)

LILLY

What happened?

MARA

Where?

LILLY

Here.

(Mara does a visual scan of the room.)

MARA

You tell me.

LILLY

What's wrong?

MARA
Nothing's wrong, Lilly. Go back downstairs.

LILLY
Were you looking for something?

MARA
That's none of your-

LILLY
What do you need Mom?

MARA
I didn't do all this.

LILLY
Yes you did.

MARA
I don't know who did all this...who made this mess. I've no idea.

LILLY
You did Mom.

MARA
Well that's not very good detective work. I'm your only suspect.

LILLY
I don't care. Are you looking for something?

MARA
Hold on a minute-

LILLY
This can't keep happening.

MARA
Stop accusing me-

LILLY
It just can't.

MARA
Maybe you did this-

LILLY
No!

MARA
I'm sorry. Can I help you find anything?

MARA

Okay. *If* I did this it was because I had to find my...

LILLY

Yes.

MARA

Had to find my...

LILLY

Your purse? Your key? What? Your purse is right here. Your wallet is in it. You have your nightgown on. Were you looking for clothes or-

MARA

Shoe! I was looking for my little blue shoe.

LILLY

Your shoe. Okay. That we can look for in all...this.

(They search for awhile. Not finding a thing.

Mara starts laughing.)

MARA

What are we...Lilly we're making quite a mess here.

LILLY

We have to find your shoe. Help me look Mom. I want to find it so we can put the room back together.

MARA

My shoe...is that what we...Lilly I know where my shoe is.

LILLY

You do.

MARA

I keep them in the closet.

(A beat.)

LILLY

I'm choosing to be happy about this. I'm so glad you found your shoe.

MARA

(Still laughing.)

We made quite a mess in here. You and I.

Lilly cracks up.

LILLY

You and I. We did Mom. We did.

(Mara gives Lilly a hug. Lilly is taken aback by her mother's smell.)

LILLY
Mom, did you shower today?

MARA
Of course.

LILLY
Maybe we better do it again.

MARA
No! I am not going to take another shower Lilly. That's wasteful.

LILLY
Maybe you didn't get all the...maybe the soap didn't work...wasn't fragrant enough.

MARA
Fragrant? Lilly, I am a lady. I know how to wash myself.

LILLY
Just-

MARA
That thing is so complicated anyways. That...the...I don't know how I manage...

LILLY
I don't either...
(Mara and Lilly stare at each other for a moment.)

LILLY
I will go with you Mom. Let's get you cleaned up and ready to go.

MARA
(Excited.)
Ohh. Where are we going?

LILLY
We're going...shopping.

MARA
I don't need anything...but who can't use a new blouse every once in awhile?

LILLY
Right. We'll go clothes shopping.

MARA
Good.

LILLY
And maybe afterward we can go have another look at Deer Run.

MARA

Deer Run.

LILLY

That nice facility...those nice apartments you...

MARA

Why would I need to look at an apartment?

LILLY

You want to look nice for the clothes store. Let's get you a shower.

MARA

I told you Lilly. I already showered today.

LILLY

Okay. How about I brush your hair then?

MARA

Fine. But you have to find the brush in this pile you made.

LILLY

I made?

MARA

Did I make it?

LILLY

No. We both did apparently.

MARA

We.

LILLY

That's more like it.

MARA

I don't know how you put up with me Lilly.

LILLY

Sometimes I don't either Mom.

I'm just kidding.

MARA

Sometimes I wonder.

LILLY

Here it is.

(Lilly begins brushing her mother's matted hair.)

MARA

I don't thank you enough.

LILLY

Oh. Mom.

MARA

No really Lilly...that feels good...what was I saying?

LILLY

About living here.

MARA

I can't remember what I was...this is so maddening sometimes. It's like I'm losing my mind.

LILLY

Just relax.

MARA

I just...words leave me Lilly. Sometimes. I can remember things from when I was a little girl with such detail but when it comes to...I don't know what's happening. It's hard to sleep. I know that much. Maybe if I could sleep more at night I wouldn't forget so many words. But it's this fantastic little light show when I sleep.

LILLY

A light show?

MARA

Yeah. I get these pictures of the day. The one I just lived or the one I think I just lived, but then there are these... that bumpy dirt road leading up to our lake house in Michigan, you and the girls...these pictures and they sort of...disappear maybe...dissolve. They dissolve into colors. These bright, sort of bouncy...colors all mixing together and separating. Like they are having a conversation at a party or...dancing. And I can't...they start to make shapes to tell a story and it doesn't make any sense to me...they don't ever come back together. They just slowly...run away. From each other. It never makes sense to me.

LILLY

And you can't sleep.

MARA

Ouch.

LILLY

Sorry.

MARA

It's okay.

LILLY

You can't sleep?

MARA

No. Not one wink. Maybe if your father would come home already

LILLY

Mom-

MARA

...I keep waiting for Sid to come home. He's really starting to worry me. At first I was just mad at him for leaving but now...I'm really starting to worry.

LILLY

You don't get tired of this do you?

MARA

This is just so selfish of him.

LILLY

Mom-

MARA

To up and leave like this and not even call. Where did he go again Lilly? I can never remember.

LILLY

Mara.

MARA

When he comes back, I am going to slap him so hard his cousin will fall down.

LILLY

You don't remember a damn thing.

MARA

What honey?

LILLY

Mom. Dad is dead. He has been for close to ten years now.

(The heartbreak isn't old.)

MARA

Oh...that's right...

LILLY

I'm sorry Mom.

(Lilly crouches to meet her mother's eyes.)

Can I ask you something?

MARA

Yes.

LILLY

Dr. Hendrickson would kill me for saying this but, do you want me to remind you?

MARA

That he's gone.

LILLY

That he's dead.

MARA

...it honestly doesn't matter.

LILLY

Okay.

MARA

Nothing you say brings him back.

LILLY

You are right.

MARA

Not your fault.

LILLY

I'm...I'll be right back.

(She leaves.)

MARA

You didn't clean up your mess.

(Mara starts to move objects-shirts, boxes, etc in a futile effort to clean. The distant sounds of a breezy boardwalk effervesce into the room. A fanciful harmonic catches Mara's attention.

Sid appears. He has a tray strapped to his body and a floating red balloon tethered to one hand.)

SID

You're not even going to look at me?

(She doesn't.)

Mara...

(She doesn't respond.)

SID (CONTINUED)

You look like hell.

(She doesn't respond well.)

I mean you lost weight.

MARA

You're gone.

SID

Apparently not.

(Mara thinks on this for a second. Either he's lying or perpetrating some hoax. She raises her hand to slap him.)

SID

I don't think that will work.

Sorry, but death has a privilege.

MARA

No. Anger has a privilege. That's Shakespeare.

SID

So you haven't lost your marbles.

MARA

No I'm just pissed. I want to just...

SID

Me too...

MARA

I was going to say strangle you.

SID

Human contact is human contact sometimes.

MARA

Why did you leave?

SID

Sometimes...

MARA

I don't want to hear it.

SID

Yes. You deserve to.

MARA
No. Clearly it's more fun than me.

SID
Cancer generally is Mara.

MARA
Thank god I won't go that way.

SID
Damn right. You won't feel a thing. All those amyloid plaques and the twisted, hairy threads of neurofibrillary tangles will take away the pain.

MARA
What did you just say?

SID
Hey it's one of the benefits. Partial omniscience.

MARA
I don't believe you.

SID
Ask.

MARA
When will it rain next?

SID
Tonight.

MARA
Who shot JFK?

SID
LBJ

MARA
When will I die?

SID
In a week.

MARA
You're such a liar. I should-

SID
What? LBJ did shoot JFK.

MARA
Not that. It's- Why can't you ever take me seriously?

I- SID
Give me a straight answer. MARA
Mara I am. SID
(This sinks in.)
I don't believe you. MARA
(She does.)
Go.
You can't make me. SID
Ghosts have a privilege.
If you didn't come to apologize I-I...just leave. MARA
Mara, you don't feel anything seeing me again? SID
Yeah. I feel sick. MARA
This smile. SID
Makes me angry. MARA
My eyes. SID
I guess vanity never dies. MARA
Just let me- SID
You make me sad. MARA
(This stings. He slowly starts to leave.)

You still have your rock? SID

... MARA

The one I gave you the- SID

I lost it. MARA

Oh no. You need it Mara. Believe me. SID

It never worked. MARA

You tossed it. SID

So I tossed it. MARA

Do you remember the day I gave you that? SID

Sid. I want to forget it. MARA

I'm going to ignore that...God that plaid dress looked good on you. I just-I remember feeling like I never knew color until I saw you. Like I lived in saw only in black and white for the first twenty years of my life. SID

It was colorful because I was a fool and- MARA

Spilled ketchup all over yourself. SID

A new dress. The first time Daddy brought something other than ice cream back from his walks. MARA

I fell apart right there. Couldn't breathe. It was like...I don't know. I was going to suffocate until I knew your name. SID

And you gave me the miracle honey. MARA

SID
My trade secret. It worked didn't it?

MARA
Not as well as it did on the balloons.

SID
Got the stain out.

MARA
Most of it. I never wore that dress again.

SID
That was for my sake...So I could breathe.
You didn't hate me then.

MARA
And then you ran away.

SID
You kissed me.

MARA
You gave me a gift. That stupid rock...And it was a peck on the cheek.
I never did know why you ran away.

SID
Because you deserved better.

MARA
What?

SID
Better than some busker's kiss in the middle of a dirty boardwalk. We should have kissed
in the ocean, on a mountain...under a streetlight...or never at all.

MARA
What was it? Three or four days later...

SID
I came. That rock worked.

MARA
You did...

SID
I told you.

MARA
Blind luck. I barely had it in my hand...

I went door to door. SID

You never told me that... MARA

Mara, you need that rock. SID

Don't be a fool Sid. MARA

I'm serious. SID

I lost it. How am I supposed to keep track of all the things I'm supposed to keep track of? MARA

You need that rock Mara. You have to find it. SID

I never needed it- MARA

Mom... LILLY (O.S.)

Oh please don't say that... SID

Look, they're moving you into a facility for old people. Do you want that?

For old people. MARA

Old stupid people. You're not stupid, are you? SID

Sometimes- MARA

You're not. So get out of here. Lilly means what she says. You better run...or you're going to end up at Deer Run. SID

Are you joking right now? MARA

Mom... LILLY (O.S)

SID
Not at all. It's a terrifying place.

MARA
She would never do that to me.

SID
They have applesauce.

MARA
Oh god.

SID
I want you coming to me vibrant and sassy, not gummy and broken.

MARA
One week?

SID
One week.

MARA
What do I do?

SID
Find me.
I want you coming to me vibrant and sassy, not gummy and broken.

(Sid vanishes.)

MARA
But-

(Mara quickly puts on her shoes and looks at the junk sculpture she created.)

LILLY (O.S.)
Mom...

MARA
I feel like I'm forgetting something.

(She leaves anyways, limping as she goes once her shoes are on.)

(The scene shifts to another part of the house where Nick sits building a model airplane while Lilly calls to Mara.)

LILLY
Mom!

NICK
She's probably asleep, honey.

LILLY

I was just up there talking to her...

NICK

Apparently the conversation was so good she needed a nap.

LILLY

All she ever does is sleep. I swear she's in bed seventeen hours a day.

NICK

Must be nice.

LILLY

She's asleep more than she's awake.

NICK

Must have good dreams or something.

LILLY

I mean, after a certain point you are literally spending the majority of your life in an unconscious state.

NICK

She's ill. Do you see...why don't you help me with this?

LILLY

I can't help you. I've got to get her ready.

(She almost leaves.)

NICK

Let the woman sleep for god sake. We're locking her away-

LILLY

Locking-locking her away? God Nick, do you really think that's what I'm doing to my own mother?

NICK

Aren't we?

I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it.

LILLY

I don't like your phrasing. It's not prison. The people there are nice. The food is...they have applesauce.

NICK

Just help me-

LILLY

I'm not an...some calloused...I know how difficult this will be for her.

Absolutely-

NICK

LILLY

You're like five pieces away from the end.

NICK

I *know*. That's what's so frustrating.

LILLY

Nick. You don't think I'm a bad daughter do you?

NICK

I just think it's her choice. She needs to know all the information.

LILLY

So she can forget it?

NICK

So she knows the truth.

How long did you believe in Santa Claus?

LILLY

What?...I was six maybe.

NICK

When did you tell your parents?

LILLY

I didn't.

NICK

Bad daughter.

LILLY

What?

NICK

You let them do all that work. Meticulously arranging presents year after year all under a cloud of lies.

LILLY

I'm pretty sure they figured me out.

NICK

Eventually. You let them believe for years...

LILLY

Excuse me. That has nothing to do with- and they were lying too.

NICK

Doesn't matter. Lying is parenting. Being a child is about telling the truth

LILLY

Lying is parenting? You were the one who told Samantha her bunny went to live on a farm.

NICK

It's not like I put him under the blade.

LILLY

You didn't even bury the poor thing.

NICK

It was...

LILLY

What? Say it.

NICK

Nothing.

LILLY

Shredded.

NICK

Ew.

LILLY

You're the one who did it.

NICK

Ah. The *lawnmower* murdered her beloved rabbit. May Bunny rest in peace...or-

LILLY

Don't say it.

NICK

You never like my jokes.

LILLY

I'm not in a morbid mood exactly.

NICK

Are you in another kind of mood?

LILLY

Oh look I found a match.

(She places a piece, looks upstairs.)

LILY (CONTINUED)

It will be good to have her out of the house. This will be better for her. She can be with people her age...She'll make friends. You know what a chatterbox she is...she'll make them right?

NICK

(Seaching.)

Where the hell is that...

LILLY

Maybe she'll even...I'm afraid she's going to die thinking he was some kind of hero.

NICK

Who?

LILLY

Dad.

NICK

Can you move a second...

LILLY

She sits up there thinking he's coming home at any moment. It's the saddest part of this whole...

NICK

So let her think he was a rock star...can you seriously...just...shift.

LILLY

I mean...how many affairs does it take? Before that damage is permanent...before you can't forget. Before you remember it...in your *body*.

NICK

Do you have it on you honey?

LILLY

No Nick. Give it up. Geez.

NICK

I just want to-

LILLY

And I'm trying to talk to you. You never listen to me.

Maybe she'll meet someone new at this...oh god I almost used your word...at this home. A new guy. And they won't remember each other's names, but just maybe...

NICK

What the HELL.

LILLY

God, death...I think it might be memory. That's the part that scares us right? Being forgotten.

NICK

Every time. Three days...

LILLY

And the one person who deserved to be wiped from her mind is...right there.

NICK

That's it.

LILLY

And he lived like he forgot about her...

NICK

I'm going to the store. I'm going to buy a new-

LILLY

NICK.

NICK

Yes honey.

LILLY

LISTEN TO ME DAMN IT.

(She wipes his model off the table in an act of surprisingly controlled brutality. He moves toward her, uncertain. They begin to furiously make love as the lights shift to...

An underpass, later that evening. Thunder mixes with the echoes of cars and eighteen-wheelers tearing overhead. Mara seeks refuge here, looking skyward for the imminent deluge.)

MARA

Oh dear god...

(Out of the darkness a haggard figure, the UNDERPASS PROPHET approaches.)

UNDERPASS

God doesn't want anything to do with the rain. Hasn't touched it since August 13, 1968.

MARA

I don't have any money.

UNDERPASS

Ha! Money. Do I look like a capitalist?

(He doesn't.)

MARA

Look, I-I just want to hide out while the...

(Thunder. Rain begins to pour. It does so throughout the scene.)

UNDERPASS

Waiting out the storm. We're all doing that. Hoping we don't get nothing' but our shoes wet. Ha!

MARA

I-

UNDERPASS

It would be the opposite of tragic if we did. Drip-drop-drip-drop... all that wasted on us. Get out there and taste the raindrops. Name them...fight for those little sky-gifts...It's better for you than broccoli. I promise.

MARA

You're going out there?

UNDERPASS

I'm from California m'am. I'll melt.

MARA

California? Oh...what part?

UNDERPASS

I dunno.

MARA

Is it alright if I...

UNDERPASS

Finish your sentence. You want to sit? Sit. You want to stay here? Fine. Stay...You want to run away. Run. I ain't gonna stop you.

(She doesn't run.)

UNDERPASS

You want to smoke? A little puffity-puff-puff to make the rain taste like lilac?

MARA

I-

UNDERPASS

Or maybe you just want to lay down your head, ass and knees...pum-pum-pum, one-two-three, and go to sleep...Dream me up a cotton cheese castle.

MARA

No, I don't want to-

UNDERPASS

I'll only eat it if you put ketchup on it...ketchup a man can understand. Tomatoes and water...or is it vinegar? I dunno...ain't anything else that simple in the world. It's only got two parts, ketchup does. Humans got all kinds of parts. Spiders too. War, let's see...that's got three, you got the two fighting parties and then you got the victims. Love, you got the two fighting parties and then you got the...huh...what do you got...

MARA

Can you just...I can't hear myself think with all that jabbering. I've got to figure something out...

UNDERPASS

What's the third ingredient there...

MARA

My daughter will be here soon.

UNDERPASS

Oh. She pretty?

MARA

She's strong.
Strong enough to defend her mother from...you.

UNDERPASS

Your daughter ain't coming.

MARA

Excuse me.

UNDERPASS

You've driven around and over me, but you've never been here before. She ain't gonna follow you into this in-between place. Daughters don't like in-between places. Sons either. It's a kid thing. And you're in an adult place now.

MARA

You're a strange...person. I hope you rethink that when this storm is over.

UNDERPASS

You scared?

MARA

No.

UNDERPASS

That's good. First thing you've said that makes any sense.

MARA

Are you going to quiet down or not?

UNDERPASS

I'm only here to help you.

MARA

Well I don't need help. Thank you very much.

UNDERPASS

You make a habit of going out in your nightgown?

MARA

I...this is a choice.

UNDERPASS

Glad to see fashion is coming back my way. It's been three thousand years since that was the case.

MARA

Do you know...have you seen a van? A red van?

UNDERPASS

Let me think...I've seen twenty-three since eight A.M. this morning and one hundred thousand forty-

MARA

Was she looking for me? Lilly?

UNDERPASS

Your mind ain't right.

(He inspects her.)

MARA

I'm perfectly fine. Got wits enough to call the police if you try anything funny.

UNDERPASS

You've got a brain's brain do you?

MARA

Yes.

UNDERPASS

Then let's talk about the condition of your soul.

MARA

No-

UNDERPASS

I got a philosophy, see...I'm a prophet with a philosophy. You don't find that much. I'm one of a kind...Like Long John Silver's. Ha!

See, prophets ain't supposed to have philosophy because we ain't supposed to bend will.

MARA

I think I hear her...

UNDERPASS

You'll be on your way soon.

MARA

I hope so.

UNDERPASS

But I can bend will.

MARA

What does that even-

(Suddenly an enormous shock illuminates the underpass and thunder breaks the air apart. The Underpass Prophet falls to the ground.)

UNDERPASS

AGHHHH!

MARA

Oh my god...

UNDERPASS

Eh...

MARA

Are you...

UNDERPASS

I'm...struck.

MARA

Oh no. I only wished it. I didn't think-oh god...

UNDERPASS

Get...ah...

MARA

Help! Somebody!

UNDERPASS

That won't...do anything.

MARA
I'm going to...I'll go up to the road and get help.

UNDERPASS
No...I just need you to...

MARA
Here...I'm-

UNDERPASS
My jacket.

MARA
What?

UNDERPASS
Get my jacket off.

MARA
I don't-how do I...

UNDERPASS
Reach around me.
(She does, the effect is that of an embrace.)

UNDERPASS
Thank you...

MARA
I'm still going to the road.

UNDERPASS
No. I don't need it. Really.

MARA
You were struck by lightning. You need-

UNDERPASS
I don't think I was struck. Not directly...

MARA
Oh thank god.

UNDERPASS
That was scary eh?

MARA
Yes.
Very.

The lightning I mean. UNDERPASS

I know. MARA

And you weren't afraid to touch me. To help. UNDERPASS

I thought you were- MARA

You know what you're working for lady. You got that figured out. UNDERPASS

So you don't need an ambulance? MARA

I need a lot of things. Medical bills ain't one of them. UNDERPASS

Should we...I don't know...do you need some food? MARA

I have plenty of food. Just give me a minute... UNDERPASS

Sure. MARA

I'm glad you're okay.

Me too. UNDERPASS

Not that I don't think you're crazy. You are. MARA

I'm just fixated. UNDERPASS

Sid had a brother who was struck by lightning once. He was much older, his brother. Sid took care of him for thirteen years all the same. Man couldn't even talk really. Not so anybody could understand what he was saying at least...Not like you. I mean what you say makes no sense. No sense at all. Sid's brother...you couldn't understand his *words*. MARA

You're lucky.

UNDERPASS

It's not luck.

Sid's your husband.

MARA

That's right...

UNDERPASS

You forgot he was your husband...

MARA

No. He needs me for something, Sid does...

UNDERPASS

I didn't forget-

MARA

This is all his fault. Lilly's going to have to come pick me up way out here in hell because of Sid. Because he won't come back home.

UNDERPASS

Ah...

MARA

Maybe it's Lilly's fault. They took away my license you know...just stole it. Her and that husband...

UNDERPASS

It's your fault.

MARA

Yes...

UNDERPASS

And they're not coming for you.

MARA

Yes they-

UNDERPASS

And you're not looking for Lilly, are you?

MARA

I don't think so...

She's the only one who-

UNDERPASS

You want to be out in that storm. Feel the pat-rat-tat of the sky's tears...try to out scorn the world's fury...receive that horrible pleasure and heal again. Heal another hapless sap.

MARA

I've got this...

UNDERPASS

Yes.

MARA

I don't know why I'm spilling all the beans to you...I feel like I'm at the end of my rope. Like I'm breaking. And I can't string together two...ideas.

UNDERPASS

It's the desire to be air. Totally normal at your age. That's why old people don't like storms. They are weighty. Kids can love storms because children are going to be here for awhile.

MARA

I don't know what to do.

UNDERPASS

What you don't give away, the world just strips away. You've got a soul lady, and you've got a choice.

(A beat. She looks at him.)

He smiles.)

MARA

Am I going to die?

UNDERPASS

Yes. But not soon. I want to give you something.

MARA

What?

UNDERPASS

A gift. An amulet.

MARA

What could you possibly-

(The Prophet fashions a cloak for her out of a garbage bag.)

MARA

This is the most ridiculous thing...

UNDERPASS

Shhh.

(The prophet makes a silent ceremony out of blessing her. The rain lets up a little.)

UNDERPASS

What's under this cloak shall be protected.

MARA

I must say-

UNDERPASS

Don't. Humor one whose life you saved. Like a Lifesaver. Or a Jolly Rancher.

MARA

I'm not going to-

UNDERPASS

The art of our necessities is strange.
Leave.

(Something about the Prophet's intention changes her.)

MARA

Thanks. I've never been given one of these before. I feel like a superhero.

UNDERPASS

Don't try to fly. You'll probably die.

MARA

Thanks for the advice.

UNDERPASS

Walk quickly.

(She starts to leave.)

Hey. Why do you limp old lady?

MARA

So I don't walk too fast.

(She goes.)

UNDERPASS

Hmmm...that's a good one...
Then comes the time, who lives to see it,
That going shall be used with feet.

(Lightning and the scene shifts to...

*The model being reassembled. Later that night. Nick sits on the floor and Lilly enters.
They both are in some state of undress.*

Lilly sits, looks at Nick for a moment.)

I'm done.

LILLY

Oh I don't need to use the bathroom honey.

NICK

With this...

LILLY

We're just starting to rebuild the-

NICK

With us.

LILLY

Look, it happens to every man honey. It's not like that's the first time. Remember the Dewar's night?

I was just nervous.

NICK

No...I don't think you understand.

LILLY

I want to be by myself for awhile.

(This sets in a little.)

NICK

I...

(Silence.)

LILLY

You see Nick, I...this isn't working right now. And I...I want an open ear...a partner who carries his weight, someone who ...I want a story. I haven't stood on my own for a long time and I don't want to become some-

NICK

Are you talking about a break?

LILLY

Yes.

NICK

You want a little vacation?

LILLY

Or maybe...maybe a lot of vacation.

NICK

Just like that.

LILLY

I've been thinking about this for awhile. Watching Mom made me-

NICK

Go to sleep Lilly. Sleep on it and let's talk. This is a stressful time for everyone.

LILLY

I'm not going to sleep on it Nick.

NICK

You haven't thought this through.

LILLY

I'm done thinking about it. For now.

NICK

And Samantha?

LILLY

I don't know.

NICK

Looks like you haven't thought it through.
Help me finish the puzzle.

LILLY

You don't get to decide, Nick.

NICK

This is a crime.

LILLY

It's...this is...the crime is continuing like this. You and I.

NICK

This...you, I can do better.

LILLY

You can stay as long as you need to.

NICK

Stay?

LILLY

It's my house.

NICK

Just like that. Our house is your house?

LILLY

It's a technicality but-

NICK

But we're *married* Lilly. Married.

LILLY

Marriage just doesn't make sense right now. I've thought about this for a long time and it... Mom moving here makes me look... very hard at myself.

NICK

Look harder!

LILLY

I don't want to be sick and waiting for you or for... for anybody. I want my own life and my own... my own journey.

NICK

This isn't what happens. No... People, real people, stick it out until things get better. Until love makes sense again.

LILLY

They don't.

NICK

Just ask your mother. She's waiting up there for her daughter to take her shopping.

LILLY

She has nothing to do with us.

NICK

Ask her. Mara!

LILLY

Nick. Don't.

NICK

Oh she knows what she's doing.

LILLY

She's confused.

NICK

This is what people do to get to heaven. They love one another Lilly. Regardless of how much it hurts.

Mara! Wake up! We need you down here!

LILLY

You have no right to bring her into this-

(He is already out of sight in Mara's room.)

LILLY

Mom! Don't worry. Nick's just upset!

(Returning.)

NICK

She's gone.

LILLY

Asleep-

NICK

She left Lilly.

LILLY

Don't do that to me you prick.

(Lilly leaves to check.

She returns.)

NICK

See?

Look what you've done already.

(The scene shifts to the next day. In a park, Mara sleeps on a bench, partially covered by her garbage bag cloak. Police sirens in the distance are barely heard. Sully, an anachronistically dressed older man, walks to her bench. He is quite distressed.)

SULLY

(Whispers.)

M-m'am...excuse me...

Young lady...

(He delicately touches her shoulder.)

I'm so sorry.

MARA

Mmm...

SULLY

I'm so sorry to wake you m'am, but can I sit here. R-right...next to you? I've got a- I'm trying to figure something out.

MARA

Okay...I guess.

SULLY

Thank you. You have no idea how much this means to me. Sorry-sorry to wake you. I'm just- I've got this problem.

MARA

What is it?

SULLY

You see, I've got this beautiful home. Y-y-y-yellow mailbox. That's my favorite part, you see, because I can always see it from a great distance off. You see plenty of browns and silvers and boring old white mailboxes, but mine...I can see it from a great distance off. And a dog...I've got this lovely little dachshund. Molly is her name. She's got a purple birthmark right here. Very unusual. Sweet little Molly...

MARA

What's the problem?

SULLY

I-I-I can't remember where I live.

MARA

Well that's silly of you.

SULLY

I know. I went for a walk to get this paper and I...I don't know what happened, you see, and now I'm not sure which direction to go. And poor Molly, little Molly, she'll need to go o-o-out and...

MARA

You're not there.

SULLY

Right.

MARA

I never owned a dog who had trouble going to the bathroom right there on the carpet.

SULLY

I've got wood floors.

MARA
Even better.

SULLY
I like your optimism with my...my situation.

MARA
You'll do just fine. I know it. A dapper young man like you has to have a sharp mind.

SULLY
Dapper. I haven't heard that word in a long time.

MARA
I have.

SULLY
I wonder about that sometimes.

MARA
Being dapper?

SULLY
No. If words die.

MARA
They have to die.

SULLY
Hopefully not all of them. I mean...I hope some words are...immortal.

MARA
Dapper will live as long as there are dapper men and women.

SULLY
Are you...homeless?

MARA
No!

No. I am definitely not homeless.

SULLY
On your way to the hospital?

MARA
Hopefully not.

SULLY
I mean no offense. It's just...A woman never goes anywhere but the hospital without packing makeup, clothes and jewelry.

SULLY (CONTINUED)

I'm just joking. I-I-I-I'm no sexist... I mean, I'm no feminist either but... you see, it's this line from-

MARA

Rear Window. I love that movie.

SULLY

You remember that line too?

MARA

Absolutely. That movie is required. Like the pledge of allegiance.

Isn't there some line about a dog in it...

SULLY

Definitely...

MARA

Yes! "He killed that dog for scratching around in the garden last night. Must have smelled something in the ground."

SULLY

"Like an old hambone?"

MARA

"I have no idea what names Thorwald had for his wife."

(They share a giggle.)

MARA

She was in some good ones.

SULLY

Who?

MARA

Grace Kelly.

SULLY

Oh my was she a beauty. Marriage ruined that woman.

MARA

"Doesn't a woman's reputation count for anything here?"

SULLY

"Only if I'm personally interested."

(They share another chuckle.)

Out of Africa. SULLY

No you fool. Motumbo. MARA

Mogambo madam. SULLY

You're right! That's the name of that stupid movie. MARA

You're right. It was kind of silly. SULLY
Had some good dialogue though.

Absolutely. They all did back then. MARA

There was such air and poetry, you see, in the movies back then. SULLY

Oh I know. The pictures had...they felt like an event. MARA

M-m-my five cents bought me a chance to meet girls. SULLY

I wasn't much interested in that aspect. I liked the writing. The lighting. How a woman's hair just...it glowed like a helmet, a big fuzzy helmet, with that side lighting they used to use. MARA

Yes. They always looked fuzzy, like when your glasses fog up. SULLY

I guess we all look prettier through fogged up glasses. MARA

True. SULLY

You're right about the poetry. Stories had to have romance back then. And we were patient. We let things develop. We forgave more. You could talk nonsense and it was okay. Now we just want people to get to the point, just hurry up and get to the point. I do it. MARA

Then get to the point woman. SULLY

I don't have one you bad thing.

MARA

What's your name?

SULLY

Mara. Good to meet you-

MARA

Sully.
You have the mind of a movie star Mara.

SULLY

Well thank you Sully...your mother gave you that name?

MARA

No, it's...I gave it to myself. Once I left home.

SULLY

Oh. You were an orphan.

MARA

Y-y-you c-c-could say that.

SULLY

I know the feeling. My mom died when I was six and I have these three brothers so...

MARA

You became mom.

SULLY

In a way. Sometimes I think I was tired of being mom by the time I had my own kids.

MARA

That's not true. You don't get tired of being a parent. You only get exhausted.

SULLY

Very true. But I must have done something right because my kids are all good, family people.

MARA

How many?

SULLY

I have thirteen grandkids so you can guess.

MARA

You see, that doesn't narrow it down much. The possibilities are endless. You might have fifty children who bore thirteen grandkids. How do I know you weren't the tribe surrogate?

SULLY

You? MARA

Me? SULLY

How many kids do you have. MARA

Oh none. My wife died when she was...we got married older. SULLY

I'm sorry to hear that. MARA

Oh no it's much better. There aren't as many fights that way. SULLY

Is that how little you think of her? MARA

Oh no. Is that what you...no, I meant getting m-married older. SULLY

I see. MARA

Yeah. You see, we never really fought. We just disagreed. SULLY

Well she's not here to disagree with that statement. MARA

No she's not. SULLY

I'm sorry. MARA

(They share a rueful smile.)

When is your husband coming to pick you up? SULLY

Good question. You know, I've been at this park longer than I can...it's a shame. Just a shame to be forgotten about like this. And it's happening more and more the older I get. MARA

He didn't forget about you. SULLY

Who? MARA

Your husband. SULLY

Oh. I hope not. MARA

I think he's dead. SULLY

You think he is? MARA

Yes. I'm not...no, he's dead. SULLY

I know the feeling. Not being certain of almost anything. You see, I play a little game with myself. MARA

What's that? SULLY

If I can't remember something...I mean if it's back there in my head but it's all...jumbled up. MARA

Yes. SULLY

I take four deep breaths and remember that it will come back to me if it's important. MARA

That's a good idea...I guess you have to remember to remember. SULLY

That's t-true. But I find the most beautiful things in the world need to be relearned again and a-a-again. Mara

What? MARA

Just seeing if I can remember. That's all. SULLY

(He looks into her.)

MARA

So what are you doing in this lovely park?

SULLY

I don't know. Unbelievable sometimes...

Do you remember?

MARA

What I'm doing-

SULLY

No. Me. What I'm doing.

MARA

I don't have the energy to remember all your troubles mister.

What's your name again?

SULLY

Sully.

MARA

Well I'm Mara.

SULLY

M-maybe I came here to meet you.

MARA

That's funny.

SULLY

Who cares if I knew it, you see, it might have been what I was trying to do. Meet a nice lady in her pajamas...in the park.

MARA

Look buddy. I'm too old to be taking care of an old man. So don't you get any ideas.

SULLY

Do you think it's possible to love someone whose name you can't r-r-remember?

MARA

I used to say, if my dog can love me, anything is possible.

SULLY

No really. That would make for a good movie plot. Two people who have to meet each other again everyday. And fall in love each and every day.

MARA

I've seen that movie I think. A couple of times.

SULLY

You see, we would constantly feel the thrill of that first hello when you know the other person is special. Special like...like a slow breakfast. Quiet, relaxed, full of possibility. A-a-and we would never get into a routine. It would be a shock to the old noggin' each and every day.

MARA

Sounds difficult.

SULLY

Th-th-th-th-then again, it might just give you a heart attack every day. The excitement.

MARA

They have pills for that.

SULLY

You see, I came to this park to meet y-y-you. That's what I've decided. I came to this park to meet you.

MARA

I don't think so. That would be a little quick...presumptuous. You don't know me that well.

SULLY

You see, I know enough to make up my mind about you.

MARA

"The time to make up your mind about people is never."

SULLY

High Society.

MARA

No you fool. Philadelphia Story. High Society was that terrible sequel.

SULLY

T-t-t-terrible? Sinatra, Crosby...Cole Porter songs. Louis Armstrong *performing* Cole Porter songs. *Sinatra* singing Cole Porter songs. Come on Mara.

(He starts humming a tune.)

MARA

No. I don't sing.

SULLY

Then dance a little.

(He continues humming and drags her to her feet. She stumbles and limps, which catches him off guard.)

SULLY

Are you-

Put me down. MARA

It doesn't have to be pretty. SULLY

Believe me it isn't. MARA

Just as long as it isn't bloody. SULLY

You're headed there mister. MARA

C-cruisin' for a bruisin'. That's right. SULLY

(He hums. They dance a little. She enjoys his company. Echoes of the boardwalk float into her consciousness.)

That was nice. MARA

W-we don't have to stop dancing. SULLY

No...no we do. I have to go. I have to go right now. MARA

How come? SULLY

Don't you have a...you have to get home, right? MARA

Oh my...Molly. SULLY

I have to go. It's getting late in the day. I've got to get to...I'm not supposed to be in this park very long. MARA

But I...okay. You're right. SULLY

Do you know where you're going? MARA

SULLY
No...No, I need to go home too.

MARA
Where do you live?

SULLY
I live by the ocean.

MARA
(This sounds familiar to her.)
I'm headed that way too. I'll walk you part of the way.

SULLY
I have a...you see, my house is the only one with a y-yellow mailbox and it's a block from the ocean. That's all I know.

MARA
I can use the company.

SULLY
Football injury?

MARA
What?

SULLY
Y-your limp.

MARA
No. I've just got something in my shoe.

SULLY
We can wait. You can take it out.

MARA
No need.

Thank you.

SULLY
For?

MARA
For...I don't know. You're a nice man...a sweet man. Thank you for making me feel...
Look, it ain't that I'm not fond of you.

SULLY
Taxi. Oh I can do the Robert Alda lines. You are in for some trouble now.

(The scene shifts to later that evening. Lilly enters wearing a garbage bag cloak. Nick

follows, similarly decorated.)

NICK

See? Even according to him you are being a fool-

LILLY

He said she went east...

NICK

Even a homeless person has better sense than you-

LILLY

Which way is east?

NICK

You should listen to the prophet, Lilly.

LILLY

I don't take the advice of crazy people.

NICK

Then stop acting like one.

LILLY

Nick. I don't expect you to like this. I know it messes with your delicate sense of...balance. But I want you to respect it.

NICK

My delicate sense of--- This whole thing was a ruse.

LILLY

I-

NICK

This was a costume of love...a veneer. A brilliant mask.

LILLY

It's not that simple Nick. And you know it.

NICK

Plenty of women like me, you know. It won't take me all that long to find a girlfriend or a...

LILLY

I know that Nick. What women wouldn't want a grown man whose biggest worries revolve around model airplanes?

NICK

Don't you drag the airplanes into this. Next up it will be Smanatha. Oh... Have you thought of that? Have you? What this is going to do to our little girl?

LILLY

It's this way isn't it? Toward the beach.

NICK

It's fine Lilly. I'll tell her when we get back.

LILLY

God-

NICK

But I won't spare you blame. Believe me. I can explain to Samantha that Mommy decided she got tired of her and her daddy. That Mommy wanted to find herself.

LILLY

Nick-

NICK

That Mommy wanted to siphon all the life out of this family because Daddy has stressful days and doesn't listen-

LILLY

Stop.

(Starting to cry.)

Stop. Stop. Stop...

(She sits down, cross legged.)

NICK

I have no sympathy for you right now.

LILLY

I just...I need support. I need coffee when I'm tired...I need a hug when I ache...I just...I'm done.

NICK

You're not a quitter Lilly.

LILLY

Maybe I am.

NICK

Get up. You look like a child there.

LILLY

I don't want to hurt anybody...

NICK

(Pointing to his cape.)

It's okay. I'm protected.

She smiles a little at this, maybe rolling her eyes.

LILLY

I don't want to hurt you Nick, I just...this isn't something I want to do.

NICK

It's hard to imagine you want to sit in the dirt and cry.

LILLY

I feel...I feel like a little brat.

NICK

You are.

I'm sorry. That wasn't...

LILLY

Need is just different from want. Do you know what I mean?

(A long silence.)

NICK

Look at this stick.

LILLY

What about it?

NICK

It can do anything.

LILLY

Like what?

NICK

My first impulse is to dig for dinosaur bones.

LILLY

Makes sense.

NICK

I wonder if we would have liked each other as kids. Maybe this whole thing would have worked out if we met sooner. Earlier.

LILLY

I had acne.

NICK

I was fat.

On my back. LILLY

Eww...I mean, that happens. NICK

What if we buried each other? Right here.

With that wooden...spade. LILLY

Exactly. We might...no. Even better. Let's bury our capes. NICK

Our bags? LILLY

Yes our superhero gear. Let's bury them. NICK

(He starts digging with his stick.)

I don't want mine

(She starts tentatively scooping the ground with her hands.)

I was very quiet. LILLY

Huh? NICK

As a little girl. I was quiet. LILLY

Oh. I was bossy. But that's because my parents told me about sex when I was six years old. NICK

Really? Six years old? LILLY

Yes. That's when I asked. And believe me, I wielded this knowledge like it was the Shroud of Turin. That was valuable knowledge. NICK

Did you kiss girls? LILLY

NICK

No. I was too scared. That was the thing. I thought, the way my parents described sex to me...It didn't occur to me that people would choose to do that to each other. And my mom told me there is only one right fit in the whole world, which is why monogamy or...I don't know what word she used, why there's only one person for you. God made only one fit. So I went around thinking sex happened while two married people were asleep.

LILLY

Really?

NICK

Oh yeah. When my aunts would come over and say they were "trying to have a baby" I thought it meant they were praying really hard to have sex in their sleep.

LILLY

Wishful thinking.

NICK

So to answer your question, no. I didn't kiss the girls.

I prayed with them.

LILLY

I was very religious. There's a chance we might have gotten along.

NICK

You stopped digging.

LILLY

Sorry.

(He goes to help her. He gives Lilly the stick and starts scooping with his hands.)

NICK

I played house. I was the only boy who would.

LILLY

Yeah?

NICK

I always wanted to be a dad.

LILLY

Hmm...I never did.

NICK

Not surprising for some reason.

LILLY

Control.

NICK

What?

LILLY

You wanted control...you had some hetero fantasies.

NICK

No. The opposite actually. I liked talking. I used to like talking. And listening. The boy games...you sort of knew how they all ended. Han or Luke would get to the Deathstar and blow it up...He-man would beat Skeletor. That world had rules and the good guys always won.

(The hole is big enough. They bury her cape.)

LILLY

Now yours.

NICK

I think he tied it a little too well.

LILLY

Here...

(She goes to help him.)

NICK

So you were sad when you got stuck playing the bad guys because it was a losing proposition from the beginning.

Just rip it.

(She does. She places his cape into the hole.)

NICK

Playing house...you never knew...You just never knew.

(They are side by side in front of an ungraceful little ball of plastic.)

NICK

There.

Let's go find your mom.

LILLY

(Offering the stick.)

Here.

NICK

I don't want it.

Come on. Let's go.

(Twilight falls near a quiet boardwalk. The ocean barely registers laps against the decaying planks. Mara enters. Out of breath but purposeful, she goes to the edge.)

MARA

I'm here.

She looks around.

Nobody cares.

Where...Sid. Sid!

Sid...

She takes a deep breath.

I don't care if you come. I really don't. I came here for myself. To get out of that house. Go for a walk...a long walk. You don't have to meet me halfway. Really.

This is like that time you dropped me off at my house and said you would come back later. To play me a song. On your violin. Do you remember that? You might have thought you were joking, but I didn't. I set my alarm. Laid out my dress. Two-thirty. AM. And I got out of bed...put on my satin evening dress. I put-I put on my *good* underwear. And I waited. Did you know that? I waited that night for hours. I practiced what I would say to you when you arrived outside my window. I practiced in my sleep. When you threw a rock and found that I was there...all dressed up for our private concert...that was a delicate surprise I had planned. I waited there in the dark.

But I didn't mind. You see...when the world started to glow a little bit...just a little bit. I noticed the birdsongs start. It's like an orchestra warming up, you know? First the tuba gets going and then the flute or something and then the strings. All these different sounds finding their way to...to something. Their place...Birds practice their songs when they sleep. Did you know that? All night they shape their song...finessing the notes. Molding them so they sound just right. They each woke up and searched for their place. So I whistled with them. Don't know if they heard me or cared much. But I did...and I was up before the sun.

This isn't about you Sid.

(Mr. Decker, dressed like a hobo clown, watches the end of this.)

DECKER

Sid. Is that your name for the ocean?

MARA

Oh...I. No. No it's not.

DECKER

It's okay to talk to the ocean, you know. It listens. Or at least pretends to listen. Don't you Mordecai.

MARA

Mordecai?

DECKER

That's my name for the ocean. Mordecai. I think it's a sufficiently ominous and unused name. Forgotten and not too happy about the situation. That's what the name Mordecai says to me.

MARA

So you call the ocean that.

DECKER

Oh yeah. You love the name, don't you Mordecai? See? A wave down there just smiled.

MARA

You're a little strange.

DECKER

Thank you.

You're old and ugly.

MARA

I beg your pardon.

DECKER

You heard me.

MARA

That's a little mean.

DECKER

Being mean doesn't make it less honest. Sometimes ugliness has its course. Better to be lean and hungry than fat and bitter.

MARA

I don't follow.

DECKER

Nobody does. That's why I work out here.

MARA

On the boardwalk?

DECKER

My whole life. Fifth generation.

MARA

There was a boardwalk five generations ago?

DECKER

Not here.

MARA

Oh.

Doing what?

DECKER

(He pulls out a wax mouse on a string, which he manipulates to move across his body.)

I'll let him show you.

MARA

Oh my... get that thing-

DECKER

He's harmless.

(Whispers.)

And made of wax.

(Holding the mouse up to his ear.)

What's that? Don't use that kind of language Morty. There's a lady around. Show her what you can do. Walk backwards...crawl in my shirt. No? Then go on up there to my shoulder. There's a treat up there for you.

(The mouse "walks" up there.)

MARA

That's disgusting.

DECKER

Don't hurt his feelings. He won't react well.

(He pulls the mouse back down.)

Now rollover.

(He puts the mouse to his ear.)

DECKER

What's that?

Do it Morty.

Because I say so.

(The mouse rolls over his arm.)

MARA

Get rid of that thing. It's disgusting.

DECKER

Do you hear that Morty? You didn't please the lady. The one you were made for.

I know...she's the one who said- It's your punishment Morty. Own up to it.

Any last words?

(He holds the mouse up to his ear again.)

Should have chosen something more meaningful Morty. I hate to tell you.

*(Decker stomps on the wax mouse until it is unrecognizable.
To Mara:)*

Happy now?

MARA

I...no.

What a waste. You didn't have to-

DECKER

It's your fault. He was made just for you.

MARA

I'm sure.

DECKER

Be sure. It's true. I pulled that mouse out of my pocket for you. I'm not about to let him live a meaningless life. A lonely life, just because you don't want him. He's better melting into the planks.

MARA

You make your living-

DECKER

Selling Morty and all of his twin siblings.

MARA

How nice. My husband sells balloons.

DECKER

Where?

Here. MARA

Don't know him... DECKER

He...well he's the one selling balloons that don't pop. MARA

Ah. DECKER

You know who I'm- MARA

I've heard of him... DECKER
Your husband, he did this a long time ago.

We're not *that* old. MARA

The red ones. And he sells them by putting a pin through the balloon. DECKER

Oh yeah. That's how he closes the deal. MARA

Really. You're his wife? DECKER

Yes. MARA

Decked out in a cape and everything. Come out here to tell him what? His dinner is getting cold? You need some help with the kids? Look at you. Fascinating... DECKER

I'm just ready for him to come back. MARA

And what would you give for that? DECKER

To- MARA

To have him back. DECKER

MARA

Oh, I don't know. He'll have to pay his own way for doing this. Just up and leaving without letting me know. He'll be giving up a lot. Let me tell you that much. We're going to watch *myt.v.* shows from now on.

DECKER

He left you.

MARA

Yes.

DECKER

He didn't want you...

MARA

No. He wanted me. He's just...stubborn.

DECKER

You must feel so alone.

MARA

Most days I do. You're right...

DECKER

Would you give up your cape?

MARA

My cape?

DECKER

To see him.

Would you give it up? What does that cape mean to you?

MARA

I'm not wearing a cape.

DECKER

Is that thing a symptom of the crazy or perhaps a cause?

MARA

I don't understand.

DECKER

I'll be clear. Why are you wearing a garbage bag?

MARA

Now that's a silly question

I don't know. Why are you wearing a shirt? We each have to wear clothes.

DECKER

I would hardly call that clothing. It's so fascinating what the imagination allows itself to do, isn't it?

(He begins undoing her garbage bag cape.)

MARA

Excuse me.

DECKER

I want it. You've clearly no use for this.

MARA

How do you know that?

DECKER

Believe me. You'll get it back. When we find Sid.

MARA

I...

DECKER

I know where he is.

MARA

You do. Well then you tell him he better march his fat butt back here right-

DECKER

We need to go see him. It's not far. Just inside that shed over there.

MARA

He's...

DECKER

I'll show you what he's been doing. Let's go to that supply shed. Right next to the whack-a-mole and the old time photo shop.

MARA

How charming.

DECKER

Yes. It is charming. Let's go.

MARA

I don't...do I look alright? No...I don't care. Let's go.

(Nearby, Nick and Lilly tiredly call out:)

NICK

Mara!

Mom... LILLY

Mara! NICK

Are you alright Lilly? Sit down.

LILLY

No. I just...how could I lose her Nick? It's my job to watch her...

I can't...this is unbelievable.

NICK

We'll find her.

LILLY

I keep thinking about this woman in support group Sarah, whose father ran away and they found him three days later under a porch.

NICK

Mara!

LILLY

He pissed himself and didn't know where he was...oh god.

NICK

Lilly she needs you.
When we find her...I don't think the home is a good idea. For you or for her.

LILLY

I know...I'll feel so guilty.

NICK

It's not that. I...this is what people do for one another. We look out. We search. It's unnatural to stick your mom in somebody else's arms. At least while she knows who you are.

LILLY

You don't think that man under the highway-

NICK

No. No I don't.

LILLY

Mom!

(She pauses. He looks at her.)

NICK

Don't do that.

What? LILLY

Don't think that way. NICK

We will find her. We will.

(Mr. Decker guides Mara into his storage unit, which is filled with artifacts from failed boardwalk ventures- glow sticks, crank-organs, wax mice, red balloons.)

This is... nice. MARA

(He shuts them in.)

Do you see him? DECKER

Who? MARA

Sid. DECKER

My husband? MARA

Yes. Your husband. DECKER

No. Why on earth would I- MARA

DECKER
Because that's who we came here to look for. Don't you see him?

(He picks a balloon up.)

In every one of these.

MARA
Not unless he lost some weight and shrank about six feet.

DECKER
He made them right?

MARA

No. Sid made unpoppable balloons. That's why they were-

(Decker picks up a pin and sticks it through the balloon. It does not pop.)

Will you look at that...

DECKER

He ran this place for years.

MARA

No. He wasn't a manager. Sid was-

DECKER

I mean he was popular. More popular than any of us. Squeezed the people dry with these things.

MARA

They sold well. He wasn't much of a businessman though.

DECKER

That's what I mean. He didn't seem to care that he was...

MARA

He had a family. I had my books so we did alright back then. He didn't need to make much money.

DECKER

But that's the thing. He did. He made lots of money. More than anybody. More than the hotel for chrissake.

MARA

Never spent it well.

DECKER

It was...people threw themselves at him, like he was an oracle or something. A hero back from a journey. Selling these trinkets. Cheap, exotic memorabilia from his odyssey. In the form of these stupid. Red. Balloons.

MARA

I haven't seen one of these in years.

DECKER

They thought he had real magic.

MARA

Do they still sell well?

DECKER
Nobody sells them.

Nobody knows how to make them.

MARA
That's a shame. Now where is he?

DECKER
You tell me.

MARA
Now that's not what you said. You said Sid would be here.

Oh my god...has he been down here working the boardwalk all this time?

DECKER
You don't know...

MARA
I feel so stupid...Oh, I'm gonna smack him so hard his cousin will fall down.

DECKER
Sid is dead.

MARA
What?

DECKER
He's been dead for years. And these stupid things never die. I throw them into the ocean and they just roll back to shore. I put them in the garbage, they somehow reappear.

MARA
Sid is dead?

DECKER
He's been dead for ten years...

MARA
(Hiding the realization. It feels fresh. Not old and forgotten.)
That's right...how did he...do you know how he died?

DECKER
No. That's not exactly my...department.

This hurts doesn't it?

MARA
Yes...

DECKER

Listen, I've heard rumors about how he made the balloons unpopable. Do you...know?

MARA

Now how did he...oh god. I came all this way and he's gone.

DECKER

Listen to me. How did he make them?

MARA

I don't feel good.

DECKER

Then let's make you more comfortable

(He sits her down and undoes her shoes)

(On the boardwalk, Nick and Lilly come to the ocean.)

NICK

Smells like hell.

LILLY

You look in the shops and I'll try the bathrooms.

DECKER

Have you been walking with a rock in your shoe this whole time?

(He dumps a rock out of her shoe and massages her feet.)

MARA

Stop it. That tickles.

MARA

Can you...can you call my daughter. She's...

DECKER

(He slowly moves to her shoulders.)

How? Tell me and I'll call her.

Just relax...

MARA

I can't teach you how to use a phone. She...

DECKER

The little balloons. How those?

MARA

I don't remember her number. Her name is Lilly...please look her up...
I'm dizzy.

LILLY

I'm going to be ill Nick...

DECKER

Tell me how he made them. That man who left you.

MARA

Honey. He did it with honey...can you just...I'm going to be sick.

DECKER

Don't make fun of me!
How did he do it?

MARA

Honey...they're coated...

DECKER

(Decker grabs Mara, slowly strangling her, almost delicately.)
I hate lies.

MARA

Please...

DECKER

He won't know. He's dead. Come on.

MARA

Help...

DECKER

Come on...

MARA

(With her last breath:)

HELP!

(Nick and Lilly both hear this. Decker stands over Mara. The primal sound of something coming unhinged. Blackout. This sound gives way to that of an ethereal space filled with air and whimsy.)

(Mara finds herself seated on a bench. Birds sing all around her, but in unearthly tones. There are one or two fire hydrants visible.)

MARA

No. I'm sworn to secrecy...

What's this? Lilly. Sid...When did I get so full? I don't remember eating. Oh no...

This is what heaven looks like? Shit.

(She covers her mouth, looks around, and realizes nobody cared.)

MARA

Why are there so many fire hydrants?

You were wrong Sid. You said a week. That was no more than two days. Liar...And that cape didn't do anything.

(The sound of playful barking. Topper, a large dog, bounds into view.)

Oh hi Topper. Topper? TOPPER!

(Their reunion is much happier than that of two people.)

You silly girl. Where have you *been*? Oh who cares. You're here! You still don't like baths, do you? I can smell it. Oh I'm so happy to see you again. Lilly was so depressed when you died Topper. She probably gained fifteen pounds. Poor thing. And you. You! So healthy. That hip is totally healed isn't it girl? I don't feel so bad myself.

(Sid enters. He still carries his balloon.)

SID

Beautiful isn't it?

MARA

What?

SID

You know...The great hereafter.

MARA

Sid...

SID

You're early.

MARA

Sid. I-

SID

I've missed you Mara.

MARA

You did die...

SID

So did you. Too soon. Nobody around here is happy about it.

MARA

It's not like I choked myself.

You took off the cape. SID

That crazy man- MARA

Prophet. SID

Whatever he was. I didn't know. MARA

You're here. SID

And so are you. Sid... MARA

Mara. SID

(He sits next to her. Mara grabs his hand. They are finally together.)

I...you know I forgive you. I just realized it. MARA

You'll have a lot of moments like that here. It's the partial omniscience. SID

Oh my...LBJ... MARA

I *know*. SID

Are they- MARA

They're friends. They play bridge all the time. JFK wants to go sailing, but nobody trusts them out on the boats alone. SID

But that's wrong. MARA

What? SID

I didn't forgive you. MARA

SID

Sometimes that's the -

MARA

Maybe until just before...or now. Now. Right now. Sid. I forgive you.

SID

That's the only reason why I got in here.

MARA

Huh...

SID

That's what it took. You were my last piece.

MARA

Then how did I-

SID

Don't rub your blamelessness in my face woman.

MARA

Blameless, no. I did my share Sid. I know that. It's just...I was hurt and I still forgave you.

(Sid hugs her, deeply.)

My...

SID

It's been so long since we were...

MARA

And no time at all.

SID

Eternity is hell when you're alone.

MARA

Topper was here.

SID

Topper and I...we exhausted all possible conversation subjects. You can only re-state your hatred for cats so many times.

SID

Come on. There are donuts. And no consequences.

MARA

Lilly...

SID

If you go back those days are going to feel...they won't be good. For me or for you.

MARA

There will be some good.

(A beat.)

SID

Ask Topper.

MARA

The dog.

SID

They're all powerful. Kind of like mini-gods.

MARA

No.

SID

She's the only way you can get back.

MARA

Seriously?

SID

Absolutely.

MARA

Why the dog?

SID

They run this place.

MARA

You are joking.

SID

Not even god is as blameless as a good dog.

You'll lose your memory again.

MARA
Lilly is more important than my memory.

Bye Sid.

SID
Goodnight Mara.

MARA
I'll see you soon. Right?

SID
Time's so relative here. It's exhausting.

MARA
I can't wait Sid...Really.

SID
Sleep well.

MARA
Topper. May I go see Lilly? I need to go back for a little while...

(She gets transported. The sound of something cosmic being put back together.

It is nearly daybreak. Police lights flash in the distance and some bureaucratic commotion ensues. Mara looks out toward the ocean. Lilly approaches Mara and leans her head on her mother's shoulder.)

LILLY
I'm not even going to yell at you.

MARA
You sound like me.

LILLY
You never yelled Mom.

MARA
Remember that time you came home with that F for cheating on a test? What was it anyways?

LILLY
Spelling. I remember. You found it in my bag.

MARA
No. I wasn't nosy. It dropped out.

LILLY
With a little help.

MARA

Boy was I steamed. But I didn't show it. I didn't show it. I just couldn't believe my daughter would lie.

LILLY

That was the scariest part. You not yelling.

MARA

Power is silence sometimes.

LILLY

I told Mrs. Knox I couldn't study because you kept me up all night beating me.

MARA

She was my spades partner!

LILLY

I guess you raised a stupid daughter mom.

MARA

Taught her everything she knows.

LILLY

There's nothing like letting someone you love down.

MARA

Especially a good spades player.

LILLY

Mom?

MARA

Daughter.

LILLY

I have a question.

MARA

What?

LILLY

What were you looking for?

MARA

Looking for?

LILLY

With all this. What were you looking for that was so important?

MARA

It's hard Lilly.

What? Tell me. LILLY

I don't know... MARA

You don't have the words? LILLY

No I... To be forced out the door of your own life. Losing your precept-percept... whatever. Losing it. That's difficult. I don't want to be a burden for you. MARA

Mom. I made you a burden. LILLY

I'm not easy Lilly. I know that. MARA

You don't need to be. I can change. I can be more patient with you. LILLY

But you shouldn't have to Lilly. MARA

So what. LILLY

Hm? MARA

Were you angry at me? Scared? What was it? Because this can't happen again. It's too hard. LILLY

I don't even know Lilly. MARA

You mean you don't remember. LILLY

No. I remember for once, but it's not clear... MARA

Fine. Maybe you just felt like a walk. LILLY

No. I was looking for someone... something to save me. Some force to tell me what to do and how to be. To make this easy on me and on you and Nick. MARA

LILLY

You weren't looking for Dad.

MARA

For awhile. But I'm tired of waiting for him.

LILLY

Just tired?

MARA

I don't need him Lilly. He's not going to save me.

LILLY

You have no idea how much of a relief that is to hear.

MARA

I choose him. Because I want to.

LILLY

Oh...

MARA

I want to...

(Nick enters. He is tired.)

NICK

Need a blanket or anything?

MARA

No, thank you.

NICK

The police are almost done. They want to ask her a few more questions later today. I told them it might not...well, they want to ask her a few more questions.

MARA

Oh. I'm such a prized fool Nick. You are so good to me. What a good man. A patient man. And he is that rare one who gets handsomer as he ages.

NICK

Are you hitting on me Mom?

MARA

No. You've got a good girl. Right here.

NICK

I'll go get the car.

LILLY

Thank you.
Nick.

(He leaves.)

MARA

Now there was something I came back for...

LILLY

Came back?

MARA

I don't know...
Well, let's get on with it Lilly.

(Mara stands up and remembers for a moment what she needed.)

MARA

No...

(She takes off her shoe, dumps out a rock and picks it up.)

That's what it was. Before I forget, this is yours.

LILLY

A shoe rock. How nice Mom.

MARA

I know it seems stupid, but...I want you to have this. It will help you find me.

LILLY

Thanks Mom.

MARA

If you choose to use it.

LILLY

What made you think of that?

MARA

I don't know...it should be yours now.
Walking...that's what did it- reminds me why I kept that silly rock all these years after your father gave it to me. I guess- it's wise to look the same place many times for the thing you want. Maybe it's important you know that...but it might not spare you this disease I have...

LILLY

That's okay Mom.

(Lilly leans on her mother again. They look out over the ocean.)

MARA

It's going to be a great day.

LILLY

I hope so.

(The car honks. Mara and Lilly move toward it as the lights go down.)

The end.