

TIGHTLY BOUND

By Patrick Gabridge

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INSOMNIA

by

Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS

MARY 30's, a young mother

ANNA 20's – 40's, lots of other people in Mary's life and
 subconscious.

TIME: Present. Night.

SETTING: MARY's bedroom, with a bed or cot, and a chair or stool.

AT RISE: MARY, mid-30s, in a nightgown, sitting up on the bed, facing the audience. ANNA, also wearing a nightgown, stands behind her, or perhaps is perched on a stool.

ANNA: Insomnia. Noun. Chronic inability to fall asleep or remain asleep for a length of time. Insomniac. Noun. One who suffers from insomnia.

MARY: I am not an insomniac. Not by nature. I have always been a good sleeper, one of those people who doesn't linger or mull before drifting off at night. I may spend my day slogging through various mental mud pits, but when it comes time for sleep, I'm ready. I always felt that insomniacs didn't value sleep enough, that they were somehow weak.

(ANNA begins to cry, loudly, the cry of a young baby.)

MARY: I am now a mother, which by definition should read: Mother, see also: insomniac--one who suffers from the inability to remain asleep for a length of time. Every night.

(SHE rises from her bed and tenderly takes ANNA in her arms to comfort her. This takes a moment. MARY disengages herself and tiptoes back to bed. The instant SHE is relaxed, ANNA begins to cry again.)

MARY: I don't understand it. It's as if she possesses a special sensor that informs her the instant that I'm on the edge of sleep again.

(SHE rises and comforts ANNA again. MARY returns to bed. Settles down. ANNA creeps to her side, as an older child now, and tugs on MARY's sleeve.)

ANNA: Mom. I have to pee. Mom. Mom, I have to pee!

(MARY opens an eye, sits up, and points.)

MARY: The bathroom is that way. Go. Don't stand there looking at me, go to the bathroom. Go on. Go!

(ANNA circles behind MARY, who relaxes again. ANNA comes and tugs on MARY's sleeve again.)

ANNA: Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. ***(repeatedly, until Mary addresses her directly)***

MARY: ***(to audience)*** I am awake. She knows I am awake, since she woke me up only a few minutes ago. But she won't ask her question, and she won't go away. I'm a bad parent, because all I want from them, at this very moment, is for them to go away. I am filled with rage, and it is everything I can do to keep from leaping from bed and throttling the life out of her. ***(to ANNA)*** What?

ANNA: There's a spider in my room.

MARY: No, there's not.

ANNA: Yes, there is.

MARY: No, there's not.

ANNA: Yes, there is.

MARY: How do you know?

ANNA: I saw it.

MARY: It's dark. How can you see a spider in the dark? Do you have magical spider detection vision?

ANNA: There's a spider in my room. I can't sleep with a spider in my room.

MARY: ***(to audience)*** Which means that I can not sleep while there's a spider in her room. Which means that I will now annihilate the spider.

(MARY gets out of bed, pulls over ANNA's stool, stands on it, reaches up, at the very tips of her toes, swats the spider, then jumps down, and completely, violently, totally obliterates the spider with beating and kicking and stomping. ANNA is a little frightened.)

ANNA: Thanks, Mom.

(MARY returns to bed.)

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MARY: I don't understand why the spiders seek out her room. Even if I do a preemptive spider sweep before bedtime, they congregate there at night. I am conspired against by arachnids.

(ANNA makes an awful retching sound, of a cat vomiting. MARY very slowly gets out of bed and cleans up after the cat. ANNA rubs against MARY's leg and purrs.)

MARY: And felines. I don't care if she throws up in any other room of the house, as long as I don't have to hear it. If I don't hear it, I will clean it in the morning. But if I hear it, then I'm burdened with an obligation to clean it up right away.

ANNA: Sleep. Noun. A natural periodic state of rest for the mind and body, in which the eyes usually close and consciousness is completely or partly lost, so that there is a decrease in bodily movement and responsiveness to external stimuli.

MARY: My lack of sleep at night has given way to partial sleep during the day. The decrease in bodily movement and responsiveness to external stimuli--I have that. I'm living my life underwater. Sometimes, it's as if I'm filled with water, or filled with bile, and the kids bump against me, and it blurps out all over them. ***(screaming at ANNA, who cowers)*** What the hell is the matter with you? There is maple syrup all over the table, the chair, the floor. Look, the baby is stuck in syrup, I am stuck in syrup. What the hell is wrong with you?

ANNA: It was an accident.

MARY: I don't care. Did you clean it up? Did you clean it up? Why am I the designated cleaner of all messes? Clean it up. Clean it up and take a time out and you're grounded for the rest of the month and I'm throwing away all your toys and you're never going to taste syrup or sugar again for the rest of your natural life.

ANNA: That's not fair!

MARY: Or I will kill you.

(ANNA starts cleaning up the mess. MARY returns to bed.)

MARY: And she knows I mean it. Because I have become unbalanced. I love them. They know that I do. I think. But I've become incapable of expressing it in some valid form. I am prepared to sleep. I am exhausted. The house is quiet.

(ANNA begins to snore, loudly, with the occasional snort.)

MARY: With the exception of my husband. Who can sleep through anything. Whom I love dearly and desperately, though I barely speak

to him any longer, and I may smother him with my pillow if he doesn't stop snoring this instant.

(ANNA stops snoring abruptly.)

MARY: I hear every little noise. The drip of the faucet, the scrape of branches against the house, the neighbor's car alarm that if I hear one more time I will take a brick and smash his windshield to pieces because it only ever goes off at two in the morning on hot summer nights when the windows have to be open or we'll all suffocate. Even the sound of my own breathing is enough to keep me awake. ***(beat)*** I used to wonder how people went mad, or how they beat their kids or abused their dogs or shot their husbands. But I don't anymore. I know. They couldn't sleep. They were not allowed to sleep. It is a basic torture technique, you know. You take the prisoner and prevent her from sleeping for one or two days before the interrogation.

(ANNA slams her chair down next to MARY.)

ANNA: Give me the names of your conspirators.

MARY: I don't know.

ANNA: Comrade, you are not strong. You are weak. I will break you, and you will tell us everything.

MARY: Never.

ANNA: Bring her back in two days. No sleep.

MARY: Anna Gordova, Peter Popov, Ivan Dimitrivich, Olga Karelin, I'll think of more, I'll find more for you. I'll tell you anything you want. Just let me sleep. Please. I beg you.

ANNA: Take her away.

(MARY lies down on the bed. ANNA kneels by her head.)

MARY: It is quiet. No snoring, no screaming, no retching. It is quiet. My clock has large red numbers, big enough that I can even see them without my glasses. I'm always checking.

ANNA: Three twenty one.

MARY: Okay. This is good. I'm no longer thinking about a night of sleep. That's long gone. But three twenty one is good, because that means the alarm will not ring for three hours and nine minutes. Three hours and nine minutes is longer than an excessively long nap. A three hour nap during the day would feel unthinkable extravagant. Think how well-rested I would feel after a three hour nap. I am not being deprived of sleep. I am being given the chance for a three hour nap. I am not suffering. My anger and frustration can flow out of me. Luxury. Three hour nap.

ANNA: *(into MARY's ear, the words all flow together)* Your deadline on the Roxbury piece is Friday. We need cat food. We need a copy of the front door key. Buy caulk for the window. Anna needs new sneakers. Clean the basement--what's the matter with us, how come we have so much junk--call the mason about the missing brick, turn the soil in the garden, pick up the trash in the alley, mail the check to the association, call Jessica, bake banana bread for Mrs. Templeton, call Tina about the children's museum, take the kids outside before the television turns their brains to mush, sweep the deck, paint the benches, groceries: grapes, milk, eggs, juice, cheese--why do we eat so much cheese, we're killing ourselves with fat, how about chocolate instead, we really need ice cream. Ice cream. Laundry.

MARY: I'm up. I'm up. And I break the rule, I leave the bed, go to the office and turn on the light. Turning on the light is a defeat, giving in to the voices of the mind. My husband says to do it right away and get it over with, write it all down. He doesn't understand.

(SHE grabs a pad from under the bed and writes furiously. Quickly fills a sheet, rips it off, starts another. And another. Starts ripping sheets from the pad and tossing them in the air.)

MARY: Because there is no end to it all. There is no end to the chores, the assignments that need to be completed, stories that can be told, characters created, baking, washing, folding, sorting, cleaning, dumping, scraping, planting, weeding. This never really occurred to me when I was younger. I see old women, worn out, wrinkled, but peaceful, and I wonder, what do they know that I don't? There's wisdom out there that will come, but it just hasn't reached me yet.

ANNA: Four oh eight.

(MARY returns to bed and screws her eyes shut tight.)

MARY: Now I'm in trouble, because I'm getting close to the two hour mark. And less than two hours doesn't count as getting any sleep at all. Less than two hours and I might as well quit and get out of bed for good.

ANNA: Counting Sheep.

(ANNA begins prancing, like a sheep jumping a fence.)

MARY: One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. I'm desperate. Sixty-seven. Sixty-eight. Sixty-nine. Seventy.

ANNA: Mary.

MARY: (**counting very fast now**) Eighty, eighty-one, eighty-two, eighty-three, eighty-four.

ANNA: Mary. You don't want to go out of the house like that, boys will think you're cheap.

MARY: My mother.

ANNA: Are you sure you want to take all those engineering classes? Boys don't like a girl who's too smart.

MARY: She said that. She really did.

ANNA: Your father and I are getting a divorce.

MARY: This really isn't helping.

ANNA: It's a fourteen day cruise to Alaska.

MARY: Just one practical tip, just one, on being a better mother, a better wife, or even getting to sleep.

ANNA: Relax.

MARY: Sure, make it sound easy. Do you have any idea what's happening in the world today? Our schools are failing, children shooting children, AIDs killing millions in Africa, global warming, arsenic in the drinking water, economy in a tailspin, racism, homophobia, sexism, cruelty, murder, rape, neglect, despair.

ANNA: Sleep.

MARY: I'm trying.

ANNA: Stop.

MARY: I can't.

ANNA: Just stop.

MARY: And?

ANNA: Stop.

MARY: And?

ANNA: Shhh.

MARY: I give up.

ANNA: Shhh. Baby, shhh.

MARY: (**very softly**) I give up.

ANNA: For now. Shhh.

MARY: (**barely a whisper**) For now.

(**MARY drifts off to sleep.**)

ANNA: (**softly**) Rest. Noun. One: Cessation of work, exertion, or activity. Two: Peace, ease, or refreshment resulting from sleep or cessation of an activity. Three: Sleep or quiet relaxation. Rest. Sleep.

(**Long pause, as lights fade.**)

ANNA: Six twenty-nine. Six thirty. (**very loud, as an alarm clock.**) Beep beep!

(MARY does not stir.)

(Lights out.)

**END OF SCENE
PERFECT VISION**

by
Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS

LISA 20's – 40's, Diana's older sister. Owner of the box.
DIANA Lisa's younger sister.

Time: Present.

SETTING: LISA's home office, with a set of shelves and a desk and chair.

AT RISE: DIANA sits in the chair, waiting impatiently. SHE gets up and pokes around in the shelves. SHE finds a small wooden box, maybe ten inches square, ornately carved. SHE examines it, shakes it, but does not open it.

(LISA enters and freezes in alarm when SHE sees what DIANA has in her hands.)

LISA: What are you doing?

DIANA: Sorry. I'm sorry. You were taking so long to get ready, so I got bored and. . . I was snooping.

LISA: You're a grown woman. You should know better. Some people never change. Just put down the box.

DIANA: What's inside?

LISA: It doesn't matter. Just put it down.

DIANA: Why are you so upset?

LISA: It's actually something very dangerous.

DIANA: Inside this little box?

LISA: So if you'd just put it down. . .

DIANA: Stop being the big sister and tell me what it is. **(beat)** Poison?

LISA: No.

DIANA: It's so small. A bomb?

LISA: Nothing like that.

DIANA: A mystery. Tell me.

LISA: An enchantment.

DIANA: Like magic?

LISA: The worst kind.

DIANA: How did you get it?

LISA: It was given to me, long ago, by a dear friend.

DIANA: Not much of a friend, to give you something so deadly.

LISA: Bequeathed it to me, actually. Along with an explanation. I'm glad to have it, most of the time. But maybe someday, I'll give it away, before it's too late. It was too late for her. It killed her.

DIANA: You're telling tales.

LISA: I wish I was. She thought she was strong enough. From what she wrote, there were many others before who'd convinced themselves of the same. I like to believe that I am different. I'm almost certainly wrong.

DIANA: So what's inside?

LISA: A vision. The most beautiful sight you can imagine. More impressive than the most fantastic mountain vista, more sublime than the greatest masterpiece painting. More perfect than the most perfect diamond, the clearest starry sky. Everyone sees something different.

DIANA: It doesn't sound dangerous.

LISA: Our minds don't have an infinite capacity for beauty.

DIANA: How do you know what's inside if it's so deadly?

LISA: I've opened it. Anyone can look inside once, and survive. But if you close the lid and so much as glance again. . . That's the end of you. That's what happened to Sheila. Mark Robertson before her. Keith Lamarr. Walter Jackson. Cecil LaFleur. The list goes on.

DIANA: Why do you still have it? You should keep it far away. Lock it up and throw away the key.

LISA: I kept it locked up for a long time. But to know what's inside. . . The image never leaves me. And I lust after it even to this day. I can't stop thinking about it. I don't want to stop thinking about it. In some religions, Hell is merely being deprived of God's presence. That's how I feel, Diana. I had it, I witnessed perfection, ultimate beauty. And now I'll never see it again.

DIANA: It's just a little box. It can't be that amazing.

LISA: Not a day goes by when I don't plan to open it again. Even though I know the price.

DIANA: I'm going to look inside.

LISA: No. You can't. You don't want to, really. Please. Listen, it's mine, and I say no.

DIANA: Share the wealth, Lisa. It won't cost you anything.

LISA: Don't expose yourself to the risk. You live a life that at least occasionally offers a little peace and contentment. Don't throw that away. Some actions can't be undone.

DIANA: You just don't want me to see. You're greedy.

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LISA: Please. If I thought it was safe, I'd be happy to share. But even though it's a precious experience, it's dangerous, and opening that box cannot be done lightly.

DIANA: You've warned me and I accept the risk. I think it will be worth it. Ultimate beauty.

LISA: Give it to me.

DIANA: I'm doing it. Turn your head.

(SHE opens the box and stares inside, transfixed. LISA averts her eyes, covers her face, and wails in anger.)

DIANA: Oh, Lisa. So perfect. So much to. . . Enough to stop my lungs from drawing breath. If only all the world. . . All the world, forever and a day. The love and peace and joy. . . Never before. Not if every moment. . . added all together and multiplied. Never. Here, here in my hands. Impossible to fit the goodness of the universe in one box. Oh . . . Oh, love. . .

(With her eyes closed, LISA jumps forward and slams the box shut and wrestles it away from DIANA.)

LISA: Stop! Stop!

(DIANA stares angrily at LISA.)

DIANA: How could you? My one chance to experience. . . You took it away.

LISA: I asked, I pleaded, I begged you not to open it. To have you experience it right there, in front of me, and to know that I can never. . . What were you thinking? How could you ask that of me?

DIANA: You? That's all you could think of—you. What about my experience? My rapture? Couldn't you let me experience this one perfect thing? Our whole lives, you always get everything first, big sister always goes first. Even this time. But at least you could have let me have a few more minutes. I never would have shut it, not for a year.

LISA: And you would have wasted away. It could happen. But no one can endure it for so long. After a few hours, you'd start to grow faint, overwhelmed. I tried to keep it open when I was looking. When I came to my senses the lid was shut tight.

DIANA: You had hours. Hours. You only let me have a minute, if even that. Give it back, let me at least finish.

LISA: I'm sorry. Truly deeply sorry. But I can't, you can't. It doesn't work that way. I'm sorry, Diana. But if I hadn't closed it, I couldn't have kept my eyes shut for one more second. If I could have left the room, I

would have—but it was impossible. I couldn't move. Not an inch. All I wanted was to see inside that box. This box right here in my fingers. Right here in my. . .

(SHE gently sets it on the floor between them. They both stare at it.)

DIANA: I want to look again.

LISA: Don't touch it. We'll put it away somewhere. Out of sight.

DIANA: I'll be fine. It was so short before, it wouldn't even count.

LISA: Do you still see it?

DIANA: I do.

LISA: You saw enough.

DIANA: You don't know. You don't know. You could be wrong. I'm sure you're wrong. I'm sure you're wrong.

LISA: What if I'm not?

DIANA: You never want to admit that you can be wrong. You're always right.

LISA: Maybe I'm wrong. I could be wrong. You heard it here. But what if I'm not?

DIANA: It was beautiful. More than beauty, more than words can say. You know. How could it hurt me?

LISA: A long list of people felt the same as you. They're all dead. It's still fresh for you. Savor your memory.

DIANA: I want the experience.

LISA: Give yourself a little time, and maybe the desire will fade.

DIANA: Has it diminished for you?

LISA: No. It's worse, now that you've opened it again. My fingers are tingling, itching to open it. I thought I had some semblance of control, that I really didn't want it that much anymore. But I was wrong. I'd open it again.

DIANA: What should we do?

LISA: I don't know.

DIANA: If I touch it again, I'll open it.

LISA: So will I.

DIANA: We won't touch it.

LISA: No.

DIANA: We'll figure something out. Don't touch it.

LISA: No.

DIANA: We'll have Jared come. Tell him to take it and lock it away. Don't tell us where it is.

LISA: That would be best.

DIANA: Neither of us will have to touch it.

LISA: Neither of us.

DIANA: Come on. Just leave it. Come on.

LISA: Okay.

(DIANA exits. LISA starts to follow, but before SHE gets offstage, LISA runs back across stage and picks up the box. SHE hesitates just for an instant. DIANA runs back on.)

DIANA: Lisa, no!

(LISA opens the box.)

(Lights out.)

END OF SCENE

Do Not Copy

STOP, RAIN
by
Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS

MARLA a woman in her 30s-40s
RAIN a young woman, 18-24

TIME: Present. Lunch time.

SETTING: A park bench.

AT RISE: MARLA waits impatiently. SHE's in her late 30s and wears a business suit. Finally, RAIN enters, a little anxious. SHE's in her late teens or early twenties, shabbily dressed.

RAIN: Sorry.

MARLA: I've been waiting more than an hour.

RAIN: The buses are all screwed up. I hate the bus. The people smell, the men press up against you. And you always gotta wait for the stupid thing. Waiting's not my thing, you know.

MARLA: Mine neither.

RAIN: Right. Sorry. You look nice. Is that a new suit?

MARLA: No. It's just one I wear to work. I had to take off from work to be here.

RAIN: Right. It looks good. I know you're busy and all that. . . I've been looking for a job.

MARLA: I thought you had one. At the grocery store.

RAIN: Didn't work out. My manager, he was crazy. Always making remarks, you know, passes. I like to flirt a little sometimes, but he. . . You know how it is. And the buses suck. I had to take two transfers to get there.

MARLA: What happened to the car?

RAIN: The car.

MARLA: The car, Rain. The money. The car that Rich helped you choose, so it would be reliable. So you could keep a job.

RAIN: Right. About the car. That's sort of why I called you.

MARLA: Did it break down?

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RAIN: Not exactly.

MARLA: Julio.

RAIN: He said he was going to the store for some bread and milk, just like a normal person. Then I don't see him for two days, and when he comes dragging his sorry ass home, no car. Not even most of the money left. You should have heard me scream at him. I kicked him out that night.

MARLA: But he's back.

RAIN: Some things you can't explain.

MARLA: No.

RAIN: So the car was really a good idea, Marla. I learned my lesson. If I had another, I'd hide the keys. You know I hate to ask for anything, but you know what they say about the poor man: give him a fish and he eats today, teach him to fish and he, you know, eats a lot more.

MARLA: Aren't you even going to ask about him?

RAIN: You know I want to. . . How's Nathan?

MARLA: He's great. I brought some pictures.

(SHE pulls out an envelope and sets it on the bench next to RAIN, who looks at it, but doesn't pick it up.)

RAIN: Thanks. What's he doing these days?

MARLA: The whole pre-school thing. He likes the social part of it, making new friends, the playground. When he comes home, he's full of stories of who did this and who did that. He's even starting to read a few words--dog, cat. Stop, go. It's like a window opened up to his mind, and all of a sudden a,b,c, go dog go. He's amazing.

RAIN: You're a good. . . a good mother to him now. And I'm sure Rich is a good father.

MARLA: We're trying. It's not always easy, but we're very happy. And grateful, Rain. We'll always be grateful to you.

RAIN: It was the right choice for me. For him. I'm glad it was you that adopted him.

MARLA: Rain?

RAIN: Hmm?

MARLA: You missed our meeting last week.

RAIN: I didn't forget. Don't let him think I forgot. I. . . it was the car and Julio and the buses and I. . .

MARLA: You should have called.

RAIN: My phone's out. If I can get a job again--

MARLA: You should have found a pay phone, something.

RAIN: I guess I could have left a message, but. . . Was Nathan pretty disappointed?

MARLA: Of course he was. This is the third time this year, Rain. It's one thing to let us down, we're grown ups, we can handle it. He's just a little boy.

RAIN: I won't let it happen again.

MARLA: Neither will we.

RAIN: What do you mean?

MARLA: Rich and I have been talking. Debating. Arguing. It doesn't need to be permanent. It would be good for him to know you, to have a connection to his roots. The books all say he'll need it. But for now, he's too young to be so deeply disappointed so often.

RAIN: You're cutting me off?

MARLA: We want to suspend visits, yes. For a while. We'll keep sending pictures and letters, and we still want them from you.

RAIN: He's my son.

MARLA: And he's my son, too.

RAIN: I gave him life.

MARLA: We know that. All three of us want you to be a part of his life. You're the one who acts like you don't.

RAIN: That's a lie. Sometimes I screw up. I'll make it right.

MARLA: He's only four, Rain. He shouldn't have to do this.

RAIN: But he does, because I'm his mother and that's the way I am.

MARLA: Oh, you've proved it to him quite well. It's hard for him to understand any of this, and the way you've behaved will just make him angry with you.

RAIN: It's an angry world, Marla. I'll do better, I promise. I do a lot of stupid things in my life. I know that. But most days, I know I did the right thing by giving him to you and Rich. But at night, sometimes I wake up and think about him, about him being with me, snuggled in bed, curled up in a little ball in my arms, and I stroke his hair to calm him after his nightmare and I wrap my arms around him. Blood of my blood, breath of my breath. I hold him tight, so he knows he's safe and I'll never let him go. Sometimes I'll stay like that all night, with him in my arms and in my mind, more than a dream, more than a dream. Until the sun comes up, and I have to let him go back to you and Rich, let him go all over again. It hurts, deep in my guts, and I know it won't ever go away. All I want to do is lay there in bed, all day long, until the darkness comes again, and I can have him back.

MARLA: You can't have him back.

RAIN: I know you're a good mother to him. I know it. But even a bad mother, like me, wants to see her son.

MARLA: We all want the same thing, right? For Nathan to grow up safe and happy and loved. Don't make him doubt that he's worthy of being loved.

RAIN: I missed a few meetings, that's all. . . I can find you. I have your phone number. I figured out your last name. I know people with computers, and they say that's all it takes. I can find where you live.

MARLA: Is that a threat?

RAIN: It's a fact.

MARLA: And what then? You want to take four years of building trust and flush it down the toilet?

RAIN: You're the one who suddenly wants to change things.

MARLA: Because you're hurting him.

RAIN: It was an accident.

MARLA: But you know what, that's fine. If you want to undo all that, go ahead. Make yourself the bad guy.

RAIN: Of course, it has to be me. Look at you, you have everything--a house, a job, an education, a husband. And now you have a son. How am I supposed to fit in with all that? I'm stupid and messy. My life is out of control. But I exist. You can't pretend I don't. Nathan knows better.

MARLA: We give you chance after chance, but you keep blowing it. We opened our lives to you.

RAIN: Give me a break. We met a few times, in out of the way places, places I can hardly get to. You saw how completely whacked my world is, and you felt guilty, so you paid me off a little. But I screw up a few times, and you slam the door in my face. That mess is why you have a son. You've been looking for an excuse, Marla. Opened your lives to me? I gave you my son. You gave me a few hours of your time, gave me a couple breaks. I just want a scrap, a few hours with Nathan, every once in a while. You're a mother now. What does that mean to you?

MARLA: I. . . I know what it means.

RAIN: Fine. You're in control. You decide. Okay? But you have to let me keep trying. Please? One more chance?

MARLA: I promised Rich that I would not waver. Let me talk to him, okay?

RAIN: Okay.

MARLA: But try to do something right. Send Nathan a letter.

RAIN: I will. I'll send a whole handful.

MARLA: I'm sorry.

RAIN: Don't be. I'm going to take care of it. You'll see.

MARLA: I have to go back to work.

RAIN: Yeah. . . Hug him for me. Please? I mean, really think of me when you're doing it. I'll know.

MARLA: I will.

(There's an awkward moment of parting, a consideration of an embrace, but it doesn't happen. MARLA exits. RAIN picks up the

envelope and opens it. SHE examines each photo slowly, touching the faces, trying to keep her composure. SHE hunts in her ragged purse for a pen and a scrap of paper and begins to write.)

(Lights fade to black.)

**END OF SCENE
SHIP OF FOOLS**

by
Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS

JAN MARSHALL 20s-40s.
FRANCINE STEINKELLER older than Jan.

TIME: Present. Morning.

SETTING: A rowboat, in the middle of the ocean.

AT RISE: *JAN and FRANCINE are in a rowboat. JAN pulls at the oars. FRANCINE awakens and stretches.*

FRANCINE: Is it morning again?

JAN: For a while now.

FRANCINE: You should take a break.

JAN: I'm fine.

(beat)

FRANCINE: *(in Schoolteacher voice)* Jan Marshall, exactly how long do you intend to keep rowing this boat?

JAN: It's too early for this.

FRANCINE: *(in her own voice)* Not for me. It helps. You know it helps. *(back to Schoolteacher voice)* At the risk of repeating myself. . . Jan Marshall, why are you still rowing this boat?

JAN: *(child's voice)* Sorry Ms. Steinkeller. Is recess over?

FRANCINE: It's been over for quite some time now. I want you to come inside and practice your spelling. After your marks on that last quiz, you need all the practice you can get.

JAN: I'll stop in a just a minute. Just as soon as I see land.

FRANCINE: You're going to row yourself to death, young Ms. Marshall. You either stop this instant, or I'll have you talk with the therapist.

JAN: *(in her own voice)* Not the therapist.

FRANCINE: Yes. I think that you have some hidden issues that need discussing.

JAN: I don't have issues. I just want to--

FRANCINE: **(in Therapist's voice)** I really think we're going to have a good session today, Jan. Where should we begin?

JAN: I'm feeling fine. It's just been--

FRANCINE: A tough day at work?

JAN: **(now as Congresswoman)** You know how it is on the campaign trail. It's non-stop. Sometimes I feel like it's never going to end. Donors, kissing babies, opening malls, smooth talking lobbyists. Whatever happened to the issues?

FRANCINE: Ah, but, Congresswoman, you still see the end of the tunnel. Re-election.

JAN: That's what keeps me going. Knowing that there is an endpoint, that someday I will get back in my office and draft important legislation. This is just temporary.

FRANCINE: But you're not here because everything's going fine. You're having a problem.

JAN: A big problem.

FRANCINE: Some personalities are driven, to push for the far shore. But my question for you is: at what point do you realize that you must conserve your energy? At what point do you accept that rowing for the far shore will actually cause more harm than good?

JAN: What if I can't accept it?

FRANCINE: The question I have for you is: how would such acceptance make you feel?

JAN: Helpless. Powerless. Doomed. Those aren't the types of feelings that got me elected. I'm a survivor, Doc. That's what my constituents see in me--someone who never gives up.

FRANCINE: I'm thinking that this attitude of extreme stubbornness, in the face of overwhelming odds stems from some unresolved childhood issues. Tell me about your father.

JAN: **(in Cop voice)** Doctor Steinkeller, step away from the desk with your hands where I can see them.

FRANCINE: Officer Marshall?

JAN: The one and the same. Don't try to get buddy-buddy with me. We have a few questions to ask about the sinking of the Claire de Lune.

FRANCINE: **(as an aging Granny)** Officer, I'm seventy-nine years old. I was with my grandchildren the whole time. Poor little Timmy. I always told him not to collect so many rocks in his pockets. Who would have thought?

JAN: Granny Steinkeller, I'm sorry, but we've got to take you in. I know you've meant a lot to generations of the family, but that bolt cutter in your pocket just can't be explained.

FRANCINE: Officer, I have such a hard time understanding what you're saying with all this commotion going on. Couldn't you stop rowing for a moment, so we could have a nice quiet chat? I have a cookie in my pocket that we could share.

JAN: *(in her own voice)* Really?

(FRANCINE produces a cookie.)

You've had a cookie for five days and you didn't tell me?

(FRANCINE crosses her legs and appears serene.)

FRANCINE: *(as the Zen Master)* The truth seeks its way to the surface, like a sprout to the sun.

JAN: Zen Master. How does one obtain the blessed cookie?

FRANCINE: A rowing hand cannot hold a cookie. A panting mouth spills crumbs and consumes nothing.

(JAN stops rowing.)

JAN: I'm stopped. Look, taking a break. See. What kind is it?

FRANCINE: In ancient Nepal, the monks refer to it as Oatmeal Raisin. A contradiction in a cookie.

JAN: Please?

(FRANCINE breaks the cookie, gives half to JAN, and eats the rest herself, very slowly. JAN eats hers in one mouthful.)

FRANCINE: Food nourishes best when savored.

JAN: *(as Dear Janny)* "Dear Janny, I've been trapped on a lifeboat for five days with a complete stranger. We have no food, no water, and precious little entertainment. I feel the need to keep rowing, with the thought that we might actually reach land at some point. What do you suggest? Signed, confused in the South Pacific." Dear Confused, if you stop rowing, you'll have given in to despair and might as well just feed yourself to the sharks. I say, row to your heart's content.

(JAN starts to row again.)

FRANCINE: Dear Janny, I need your advice. A dear friend of mine has been cast adrift after a deadly naval disaster. Now that the storm has lifted, the Coast Guard is certain to be searching for survivors. Should my friend row herself to death, or should she conserve her energy to stay alive until she's finally discovered? Signed, Frustrated Francine."

JAN: Dear Frustrated: It's a big ocean. If your delusions of rescue keep you from drowning yourself, good for you. As for your friend, I say a little exercise is good for the spirit.

(They stare at each other in silence for a moment. JAN continues rowing, defiantly. FRANCINE stares at her, then looks down at her feet, then back up at JAN again.)

FRANCINE: ***(as Reporter)*** This is Francine Steinkeller reporting live for Channel Five news, bringing you an update on our two castaways. After the sinking of their tour vessel in a surprise storm five days ago, our two brave women have faced enormous waves, hunger, thirst, blinding heat. But so far, their biggest enemy has been the despair of a slow, lonely death. But now, after finding a way to relieve their boredom and distract themselves from their desperate situation, they have a new challenge to face, one certain to strain their abilities to the limit.

JAN: ***(as herself)*** What?

FRANCINE: Apparently most lifeboats are not meant for extended stays in the water. Corporate officials at the Acme Lifeboat company refused comment, but our investigation shows that this is not the first Acme Lifeboat to spring a leak.

JAN: A leak? Where?

FRANCINE: As you can see, a small pencil sized hole has formed in the hull of the small, unnamed vessel. Perhaps the strain of constant rowing has weakened some of the planks in this pathetic excuse of a refuge.

JAN: Don't try to blame this on me. Plug it with something.

FRANCINE: Only now, in the harsh glare of hindsight, can the bingeing on the entire bag of saltwater taffy be seen as incredibly stupid.

JAN: We shared that bag.

FRANCINE: ***(fading from Reporter to her own voice)*** What can be running through the minds of our two shipmates? Is this the end? What was the point of surviving the initial shipwreck, only to drown five days later? In the face of such irony, can there be a God? If there is a God, would prayer at such a moment be reasonable, or would it merely be too little, too late? How will it feel to finally be taken into the sea, the all encompassing embrace, warm and salty, a return to the womb. Oh, for an umbilical cord, a lifegiving tie to the great mother, against the devouring waters. The finality is both paralyzing and reassuring. This is the moment dreamed of in fitful sleep, crouched on a rocking wooden floor. A dream dreamed so often, that the appearance of it in the flesh is no longer surprising. This is the horizon, where heaven meets the earth.

JAN: **(as the General)** Soldier! Snap out of it!

FRANCINE: It doesn't matter, General. I'm done.

JAN: **(grabbing FRANCINE by the lapels)** Did you hear me, Corporal?

You will not slip into your role as a useless pile of slimy cow dung until I order you to do so. Do you understand me?

FRANCINE: I appreciate the effort, Jan, but I--

JAN: That's General Jan to you, soldier! You are a proud member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and you are not allowed to stop, quit, or whine about your current life threatening situation. You will pull yourself together, or I will rip this oar from the lock and beat you to a pulp and still find a way to make you fight. You are not allowed to say the word Quit. If I sense that you are about to say the word Quit, that you are about to think the word Quit, that you are about to embrace the concept of Quitting, I will see to it that your last few minutes on this earth are made as miserable as humanly possible. And I specialize in misery. Do you understand me?

FRANCINE: **(as Corporal)** Clear as day, General. What are my orders?

JAN: Assess the situation.

FRANCINE: We're taking water quickly. The hole has expanded by another quarter of an inch. The rain we gathered in the boat last night has now been contaminated with sea water. We have no tools or putty with which to plug the hole.

JAN: Attempt the Dutchman's Gambit.

FRANCINE: Sir?

JAN: Insert your finger.

(FRANCINE does so.)

FRANCINE: Blast!

JAN: I said your finger, not your fist, soldier.

FRANCINE: It's all rotted. **(switching to the Reporter)** With water gushing into their boat and rising all the way to their knees, things are looking serious. Camaraderie and a certain survivalistic kinship have provided succor up to this point, but where do things go from here? Reporting live from the sinking ship, this is Francine Steinkeller.

JAN: **(as Dear Jannie)** Dear Jannie, I've reached a point where all seems lost. Is this a time to lapse into a coma of self pity? Perhaps now is the time to thank my friend for making these last few days memorable and worthwhile. For never ignoring the need of the soul to find some anchor, even if just in the imagination. For being willing to share the last oatmeal raisin cookie.

FRANCINE: **(as Zen Master)** Sustenance shared is returned a hundred fold. The Buddha once said that all true friendships are birthed in crisis and nurtured at the breast of adversity.

JAN: **(as Cop)** Now I'm telling you, Zen Master Fran, you can spout all the hot air you like, it ain't gonna float our boat any higher.

FRANCINE: **(as Granny)** Officer. Officer. There is water in my pockets. I'd like you to put a stop to this at once. I am an old woman and I'll certainly catch my death of cold.

JAN: Ma'am, the entire department's been working on this case. I've got officers putting in so much overtime they think they've crossed the international dateline. But sometimes circumstances are just beyond our control. My, that water's wet.

FRANCINE: **(as Therapist)** And how does that make you feel?

JAN: **(as Congresswoman)** I've lost elections before. Admittedly, it's been awhile. Incumbency always has the powerful high ground. There's more to me than just my work, though. I've been a wife, a mother. I haven't been perfect at these things, but I have managed some basic level of competency. There are always things you wish that you'd done better.

FRANCINE: So in the end, you're left feeling dissatisfied?

JAN: Aren't you?

FRANCINE: I'm inclined to think that life is too short to harbor regrets. My goal is to banish regret, banish fear, and find space within a few precious heartbeats to completely and totally experience both the present and relive some of my favorite moments from the past.

JAN: **(as Child)** But Mrs. Steinkeller, I just want to keep rowing a little longer.

FRANCINE: **(as Schoolteacher)** The water is over the oars now, Jan. I don't think you'll get very far.

JAN: That's okay. I never really thought I'd get us anywhere. It's just for play, Mrs. Steinkeller.

FRANCINE: I suppose it won't hurt anything. . . Row us ashore, Ms. Marshall.

(JAN starts rowing again, with difficulty, as they strain to keep their heads above the rising water.)

(Lights Fade.)

END OF SCENE

OUT OF TIME

by
Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS

MARY A young mother, in her 30s-40s.
JENNA Older than Mary. Plays multiple roles, including Jenna
 (Mary's daughter), Bank Clerk, Postal Clerk, Mr.
 Hudson, therapist, Mary's Cousin, and scientists.

TIME: From 5:01pm Tuesday, until many years later.

SETTING: **America. Bare stage with a single chair. Various locations will be represented.**

AT RISE: JENNA sits in the chair. Next to her chair might be a basket of hand props. On the other side of the stage, MARY faces the audience.

MARY: It began at 5:01pm, Tuesday afternoon. At the bank.

(JENNA starts counting money. SHE'S a bank teller. MARY runs over to Jenna, with an envelope in her hand.)

 Hello. Hello?

JENNA: Sorry, we're closed.

MARY: But I have to deposit my--

JENNA: We're closed.

MARY: But I ran here from--

JENNA: We're closed.

MARY: My watch says--

JENNA: We're closed.

(MARY finally gives up, confused and dejected.)

MARY: ***(to the audience)*** And at the post office.

(JENNA crosses to lock an imaginary door. MARY runs over to her, with letters in her hand.)

Wait! Wait!

JENNA: We're closed.

MARY: It's only 5:15.

JENNA: 5:30.

MARY: What? Oh, no. No, no, no. ***(to audience)*** I'm late for Jenna's bus.

(MARY runs in a long slow circle around the stage. JENNA stands up on the chair and looks around, anxiously. SHE's a child waiting on a bus.)

JENNA: She'll be here. Just give her one more minute. She'd never forget me. She's always here to pick me up. Shut up, Ashley. But where is she? Can I get off the bus and see if she's coming? Please. Come on, Mom. Okay. She should have been here.

(JENNA sits down, heartbroken. MARY waves frantically.)

MARY: Wait, wait, wait! Stop the bus. I'm here. Stop! Wait. . . I'm here. I was here. She'll never forgive me. I was here. On time. ***(checks her watch)*** I'm early. How can they leave early? Oh, Jenna.

(A briefcase slides on stage. MARY grabs it and turns to see JENNA, now as MARY's boss, looking angrily at her watch.)

JENNA: Mary.

MARY: Yes, Mr. Hudson?

JENNA: You're late. That's the third time this week.

MARY: But it's only. . . How can I. . .

JENNA: Are you having problems at home?

MARY: No, sir. Well, not what you'd think.

JENNA: I try to be flexible, knowing you're a parent. But every day is too much.

MARY: It's my watch.

JENNA: Buy a new one.

MARY: This is my third this week. And it's all my clocks at home, too.

JENNA: Replace them. Do whatever you have to do, Mary. I'm running a business, and I need you here on time.

MARY: I'm sorry. I'm trying. I really am. I'll try harder.

(JENNA sits and picks up a clipboard, now a therapist. MARY paces.)

JENNA: So tell me, Mary. How does that make you feel?

MARY: I'm confused. Is it something about me?

JENNA: Do you think everything is about you?

MARY: No, that's not what I'm saying. If I put on a watch, it slows down, until it's at least fifteen minutes behind. I have to constantly reset the clocks in my house. It's as if my very presence wrecks them.

JENNA: You're a busy woman, a working mother. I'm sure you always feel a little behind.

MARY: You're not listening. Something about me is. . . I don't know how to define it. I can't keep up. Time moves at a different speed for me. You all keep moving ahead, just a little bit at a time. I try to adjust, to catch up, but I can't make it last.

JENNA: Many women feel this way. I recommend that you take time off from work, soak in the tub, watch Oprah.

MARY: That all sounds nice, but I don't see how--

(JENNA hands MARY a slip of paper and starts to walk away.)

JENNA: Take that to the pharmacy. Three times a day. Should make you feel a little peppier.

(MARY steps away, looks at the paper and crinkles it up.)

MARY: I don't want to feel peppy. I just want to feel normal.

(JENNA circles MARY--with each revolution SHE's an older version of JENNA.)

JENNA: ***(as young JENNA again)*** Mom! Mom, we're going to be late for school.

MARY: How can. . . Sorry, I thought it was earlier.

JENNA: Arianna pushed me yesterday.

MARY: Tell her you don't like that.

JENNA: ***(slightly older JENNA now)*** Mom, I need money for a band uniform.

MARY: You just started taking lessons.

JENNA: ***(even older JENNA)*** Our big concert is tomorrow. Try not to miss it.

MARY: I'll be there. I'll leave right now, so I won't be late.

JENNA: ***(college aged JENNA; takes an envelope from her pocket)***
This is it. Acceptance or rejection. Should I open it?

MARY: You have to. Don't you?

JENNA: **(SHE opens it)** I'm in. I'm in. Juilliard here I come.

MARY: Be careful.

JENNA: I will. I'll call. I'll write.

MARY: **(to audience)** She doesn't. And I get worse.

JENNA: **(now as MARY's Boss)** Mary, this is unacceptable. You do value this job, don't you?

MARY: I'm trying so hard. Sometimes I even sleep in my car, just so I'll be here. But I can't catch up.

JENNA: I'm sorry, but we're going to have to let you go.

MARY: But. . . How will I. . .

JENNA: **(adult JENNA now)** Mom.

MARY: I can't catch up.

JENNA: We're getting married.

MARY: You're too young. What about your career? How will you travel to concerts? You'll never see each other. Are you sure you're ready?

JENNA: We're in love. He'll travel with me. It'll just be a simple wedding.

MARY: We'll plan it together.

JENNA: Of course. Come stay with me, for a while. So you won't get lost. I want you there. Stay by my side.

MARY: I'm here. And you're so beautiful. So happy. I'm so happy for you. What a day this is. A once in a lifetime event. And we're all here to celebrate you, your happiness, your future. The world is still yours, Jenna. Yours to live and love. All the friends and family. We haven't seen them for years. **(to audience)** They notice that something is wrong. Or not wrong. Not different.

JENNA: **(as wedding guest)** Mary, how are you? You look simply divine. Hard to believe you're finally mother of a bride, eh? Look at you, it's like you haven't aged a day. Not a wrinkle. How do you do it? You didn't get your face done did, you? You did, didn't you? It's miraculous. You must give me his name. Gerry, come see Mary, you won't get over how she looks. Gorgeous.

MARY: Thanks, Frances. I really haven't. . . No, I'm older. Really.

(MARY sits. JENNA paces behind her, a Scientist now, looking serious, taking notes.)

JENNA: And they didn't know what to make of you?

MARY: Suddenly they were all around me, my cousins and aunts and uncles, staring at me, as if I were some freak under glass.

JENNA: Because you still look so young?

MARY: Because I still look the same. Or almost the same. I have a wrinkle or two, honest. See? Oh, I'm so tired. I'm always tired. I can't

keep up. Plus, Jenna and the kids are staying with me, and Matthew is teething.

JENNA: I thought they just got married.

MARY: They did. Or so it seems. But I'm getting worse.

JENNA: We'll need to run some tests.

MARY: I don't mind. If there's any way you can help.

JENNA: I have to call some colleagues. I'm not even sure what kind. This will require extensive testing. But we can make you quite comfortable, I promise you. The university will pay for everything.

MARY: That would be fine. If there's some way you can help me. I need it all to slow down again. I used to be a part of things. I was connected to people, to friends and family, but now it's so hard. Passing me by.

JENNA: **(as a different Scientist now)** Thank you for your patience.

MARY: Where is Doctor Murphy?

JENNA: She retired. After all you've done for her and her career, I'm sure she'll stop by to say thank you.

MARY: She'll never make it.

JENNA: Our team has made excellent progress, Mary. We've known that time is not constant, but the variations are usually at the gravitational extremes. Time seems to wash over and around you, but it won't touch you.

MARY: Why?

JENNA: I wish I could say. We'll keep running tests.

MARY: I'm leaving.

JENNA: We're starting to make progress.

MARY: It doesn't matter. I need to see my daughter.

JENNA: **(JENNA is quite old now. SHE's dying.)** Hi, Mom. I'm glad you're here.

MARY: How are the girls taking it? Matthew?

JENNA: Hard. They're trying to cope. They put on brave faces for their kids, but none of us is ready to say goodbye.

MARY: How do you feel?

JENNA: Old. Weak. Sad. Sick. The medication keeps the pain down, for now. Very tired. The nurses take good care of me. I'm glad you're here. So glad.

MARY: I'm not. Look at me. Look at me. It's not right, not this way. But if it's a help to you, then I'm grateful to be here.

JENNA: You were always there.

MARY: Was I? I tried. But I couldn't keep up.

JENNA: You were my role model.

MARY: You're kind. Even now.

JENNA: You taught me.

MARY: What will I do without you?

JENNA: You'll be fine.

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MARY: I'll be lonely.

JENNA: You'll be fine.

MARY: I'll be alone.

JENNA: The kids will visit you. I love you. I love you.

(JENNA exits. MARY sits in the chair.)

MARY: I'll be so all alone.

(Lights out.)

END OF SCENE

Do Not Copy

FLYING THE FRIENDLY SKIES

by
Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS:

LYNNE 30s-40s. Lives in Boston.
DAPHNE Same age as Lynne. Lives in Denver

TIME: Present.

SETTING: An airplane, about to leave Boston for Denver. Two seats next to each other.

AT RISE: LYNNE is sitting in her aisle seat, carry-on by her feet. SHE reads a magazine. DAPHNE enters, a little flustered after making her way through the gauntlet of folks pushing and cramming things into the overheads, etc. SHE looks at her boarding pass, then down at the empty seat next to LYNNE, sees LYNNE, and hesitates.

DAPHNE: Lynne!

LYNNE: Daphne!

(After a beat, They embrace warmly.)

LYNNE: What a surprise! Are you. . .

DAPHNE: 24A. We're seat partners.

(They take their seats.)

LYNNE: You just made it. So how are you?

DAPHNE: Fine. How about you?

LYNNE: Great. Great. Where are you coming from?

DAPHNE: Boston. I was here in Boston.

LYNNE: Oh. You were here.

DAPHNE: It was a business trip. Meetings with some new clients. You know how it is.

LYNNE: Sure, but--

DAPHNE: So where are you heading?

LYNNE: Um. Denver.

DAPHNE: I see.

LYNNE: My sister had her baby.

DAPHNE: Right. I saw her at the store a few weeks ago. Beautiful. Looks just like her.

LYNNE: I can't wait to see her. But you know how babies are--so all-consuming. Diapers, feeding, cuddling. Meredith really needs a break. I didn't think I'd have a moment to spare.

DAPHNE: I only live two blocks away from your sister.

LYNNE: I should have told you. But you know how it is.

DAPHNE: How it is.

LYNNE: For example: when did you arrive in Boston?

DAPHNE: Thursday.

LYNNE: It's Monday. Two days of meetings and a weekend for sightseeing? I've been here long enough to know my way around now. I could have given you a private tour.

DAPHNE: I didn't think you'd really want to. ... to see me.

LYNNE: What are you talking about? We're friends.

DAPHNE: We were. Best friends.

LYNNE: Sure. We're still friends. We talk on the phone. We have e-mails, Christmas letters.

DAPHNE: Right. Yeah. Everyone loved the Christmas letter.

LYNNE: We would have been happy to have you stay with us. Or at least get together for lunch or dinner. Just like old times. What's the problem?

DAPHNE: We just talked on the phone two weeks ago, and you didn't tell me you were coming to Denver.

LYNNE: You didn't tell me you were coming to Boston.

DAPHNE: Exactly. We didn't tell each other. This is not something that best friends should do.

LYNNE: **(looking out the window)** You're right. Oh, Lord, I hate take-offs. They say that's the time you're most likely to crash. That and landing. The air-ground transition, I guess.

(LYNNE grips the hand rests of her seat tightly. Tries deep breathing to calm down. Closes her eyes. DAPHNE watches her closely, then looks out the window.)

DAPHNE: That's it. We're up. No turning back now.

LYNNE: I'm fine once we're off the ground. I'm fine.

(beat)

DAPHNE: I knew you were coming to Denver. And I knew you hid it from me.

LYNNE: What?

DAPHNE: That's why I didn't call you.

LYNNE: How did you know that I. . . My sister.

DAPHNE: She can't wait to show you the baby.

LYNNE: It wasn't you. I didn't want her to tell anyone I was coming. I just was going to make time for family. I still miss all of you, the whole gang, but it just gets so complicated. This time I thought I'd just glide in--

DAPHNE: Sneak in.

LYNNE: Sneak in, sneak out. That's all. It wasn't anything about you.

DAPHNE: That would be fine if we were just acquaintances. Just neighbors. But we were best friends for seven years. Who watched Amy and Samantha when Josh had pneumonia? When you and Thomas were. . . wavering, who did you call at midnight? You helped me decide to quit my job and go back to school. All our girls' nights out at the Coffee Jam. Just talking and sharing every Tuesday night. Tuesday nights were the high point of my week for years.

LYNNE: They were great times. We were close. Really close. I--

DAPHNE: I've never been one to have a lot of friends, Lynne. And I've gone long periods in my life without a true best friend. When you moved away, you were not replaced. I miss you, miss talking, hanging out on the deck, watching the kids splashing in that stupid, leaky pool. We met, we clicked, and that was it. What we had was something I've never had with my sister, or even my Mom. I love you, Lynne. You've been gone two years now, and there's something deep within me that still hopes you'll come back. I wish that what we had was enough to make a person pack up and move. But I know it's not going to happen. And I don't know what to do about it. We're not lovers. When it's over for lovers, they say, "Can't we just be friends?" What do friends say, "Can't we just be strangers?"

LYNNE: I don't want to be strangers.

DAPHNE: Good.

LYNNE: But we're not moving back.

DAPHNE: I know.

LYNNE: I'll stop by this week. I'll call you and we can set up coffee, or lunch.

DAPHNE: That's not what I want. Look, just enjoy your time with your sister and her baby. Keep it simple, like you said.

LYNNE: It's just. . . I don't know if. . . Look, this isn't high school. It doesn't matter if we were friends or best friends or whatever you want to call it.

DAPHNE: It doesn't matter what we call it, just what it was.

LYNNE: What if it wasn't the same thing for me as for you?

DAPHNE: It's a long flight. For the next four hours, let's just pretend it was.

LYNNE: Okay. **(beat)** So Josh's soccer team--

DAPHNE: Don't call me this week.

LYNNE: Don't be silly.

DAPHNE: I mean it.

LYNNE: I won't.

DAPHNE: Don't e-mail me.

LYNNE: I won't.

DAPHNE: And take me off the list for your stupid Christmas letter.

LYNNE: Fine. Whatever.

(LYNNE picks up her magazine. DAPHNE gets a book from her back. Both make an unsuccessful attempt to read.)

LYNNE: Why do you always want so much? Why can't you just be content with things as they are?

DAPHNE: Because relationships are important. The most important thing.

LYNNE: You needed a best friend so much. And you were so. . . dependent. What a tight grip you have. Sometimes I need a little breathing room from my friends.

DAPHNE: Fine. We've got fifteen hundred miles between us, that should give you enough oxygen.

LYNNE: I wasn't looking for the same thing as you, or at least I didn't find it. But close. It was close to what you felt. I'm sure of it. Close enough.

DAPHNE: For you. That's fine. That's fine. I misjudged what we had. It was vital to me.

LYNNE: It was important to me, too. Lots of parts of my life are important, but I don't give out awards for the aspect that's best. I miss you, Daphne. Not the same way, not with the same intensity. Maybe I don't feel anything as intensely as you do. Not many people do. You didn't take me to a higher plane of existence. But that's all right. We were friends and we can continue to be friends. We can recognize our bond for what it is and proceed from there. Nothing has to change for the future. Just your expectations of me. Of us.

DAPHNE: That's fine. Fine for you. Let's just be pals. Engage in a little empty chit-chat. Swap stories about our children. A light touch. Light touch.

LYNNE: Don't take everything so seriously.

DAPHNE: I wish I could be like you. I wish I enjoyed wading in the shallows. But I don't. Excuse me.

LYNNE: What are you doing?

DAPHNE: I'm switching seats.

LYNNE: Don't go.

DAPHNE: I can't stay here.

LYNNE: The flight is full. They're always full.

DAPHNE: Excuse me.

LYNNE: Don't do this.

DAPHNE: Someone will switch with me, and you can chat and make friendly and I will do the same with whomever I'm stuck with. I promise that I won't pressure them with any excessive expectations.

LYNNE: I don't want you to go. Please.

DAPHNE: Get out of my way, or I will climb over you.

LYNNE: Calm down.

DAPHNE: I'm going to count to three. One.

LYNNE: This is silly. We've known each other for--

DAPHNE: Two.

(LYNNE stands up and lets DAPHNE get past.)

LYNNE: You'll get over it.

DAPHNE: I'm sure you will. Have a nice trip.

(DAPHNE exits up the aisle. LYNNE can't decide if SHE should follow her.)

LYNNE: Daphne, get back here. The captain hasn't turned off the seatbelt sign. Daphne! Come sit down. No, ma'am, she does not want to trade seats with you. She's my friend. How can you say you're my best friend and treat me this way?

DANNY: Apparently, we were never best friends. And we're certainly not anymore.

LYNNE: Come back and we'll talk.

DAPHNE: I don't want to see you or talk to you or even think about you. Got that? ***(loudly, to her fellow passengers)*** Anyone want to sit next to my ex-friend here? Just raise your hand. A fine window seat, yours for the asking. Come on, now. She doesn't bite. She might bore you a little with stories about her family, but she's very well-behaved.

LYNNE: Stop!

DAPHNE: Someone, please. No? I have right here, a crisp twenty dollar bill for the first taker. Going once, going twice. Ah ha! Lynne, I think I've found you a new friend.

(Lights to black.)

END OF SCENE

QUIET

by

Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS

ELISA 30s-40s. The landlord.

ZELDA same age as Elisa. The tenant.

TIME: Present.

SETTING: ELISA's apartment and ZELDA's apartment, in the same house. Two chairs, facing the audience. If desired, there could be the platform of a front porch between the two chairs.

AT RISE: *ELISA and ZELDA are seated in their chairs, facing the audience. Both are at least in their 30s, but can be older.*

ELISA: The music starts pounding around noon. I'm sure that's when she hauls her lazy butt out of bed. Sets her feet on the floor and clicks that button. Boom boom boom. Like I'm not going to hear it. All I'm asking for is a little human consideration. My windows are all closed, it's not like the sound is coming through, not really. It's the vibrations. Through the soles of my feet. In the cavity of my chest. Transfer of drums into some weird offsetting heartbeat. Don't get me wrong, I love music. I listen to it all the time, but not so loud that other people have to participate, whether they like it or not. It's the fashion nowadays, to be generous with our music and our conversations. Post-pubescent boys rig their souped up Hondas so that they shake my windows when they drive past. They roll down their windows while they wait for their girlfriends and puke out their street music. I'm not old enough to feel so conservative - I don't want to be mentally wrinkled and fragile. But I do want some peace. It's my house. I don't have any control over anywhere else in the world. Not over the church next door with their hymns shattering Sunday morning, not the sirens that serve as a constant background hum. But over this, I do. I've been nice about it. Asked a few times, in person. But I'm not going to keep running downstairs and making it a habit—Zelda plays her music too loud,

Elisa asks her to turn it down. It becomes a ritual. Look at the volume dial and figure it out. There are other people living in this house. One of those persons values the ability to think quietly without a rhythm pounding its way inside her head.

(Both women stand and face each other. ELISA takes an envelope out of her pocket and hands it to ZELDA, who opens it and reads it.)

ZELDA: What's this?

ELISA: About the music. It's been loud and bothersome to me and the other tenants. This is official notice that you've been warned.

ZELDA: All you had to do was knock on my door.

ELISA: I've done that.

ZELDA: You could have done it again. A letter. The other landlord just came down and knocked on my door.

ELISA: I'm sure he did. I think this way it's a little clearer.

ZELDA: Oh, it's clear.

ELISA: Good.

ZELDA: Maybe you can ask your kids to stop jumping on the floor over my head.

ELISA: I will.

ZELDA: But I'll keep my music down.

ELISA: Thank you.

(They retreat back to their chairs.)

ZELDA: Wants me out. That's what it is. I never did anything. Just enjoyed my music a little. Not a lot of joy in my life. Not a lot of joy. All I want is the freedom to listen to my sounds, let them filter in, lose myself a little. Thinks she's so quiet. Her and her big feet and her children. Like she gives them a hammer every morning. I work until late, don't get to sleep until almost midnight. Come six a.m. there's her little darlings pounding so my pictures fall off the wall and cracks come in my ceiling. Then has the nerve to write me a letter telling me I'm disturbing everyone. Don't ask for much, just want a decent place to live, just want to listen to my music. But that's too much to ask. Don't matter. I can be quiet. Because I'm not going anywhere. This is my home. And she can't just force me out, not like that. Oh, no. I can turn this way low. I'll cozy my ear up right against the speaker. Find me a pair of headphones, though I never like it that way. Don't like my ears so hot. That's all right, I'll find my way. But she won't hear me. Like a mouse I'll be.

ELISA: Complaining about my children. They're babies. They can't control themselves. Doesn't she think they drive me crazy, too? No

quiet from them, no quiet anywhere in this house. They go off to preschool, and I want a little quiet. But no, she's got to play loud music when they're gone. When they're asleep. It's like there's a massive noise conspiracy, making sure that there's always some intrusive sound at any given instant in my life. But I'll make sure they walk on tiptoe.

ZELDA: I'm just waiting for the next letter. Send me a letter. What kind of way is that to deal with a person? I want respect. I don't care if she's the landlord, she still has to treat me like a decent human being. I'm a decent human being.

(They meet each other at the door.)

ELISA: Hi, Zelda.

ZELDA: Hi, Elisa. Music been quiet enough for you?

ELISA: Yes, thanks.

ZELDA: I've been hearing a lot of banging lately.

ELISA: Yes. We're doing some construction. It should be done soon.

(Back to their chairs, to the audience.)

ZELDA: I'm keeping my part of the bargain. I don't even slam my door anymore. I ease it shut. When I have friends over, I tell them to whisper, and I get them inside from the yard. I don't want sound carrying up to her. I want her to feel like I've become a ghost. I wait to flush the toilet until I think that she's asleep or I know she's left the house. Everything I touch, first I think about how much noise it's gonna make. Oh, my ears are always awake.

ELISA: The sound of the saws and the hammers feels like they're cutting and pounding right inside my skull. How can the men move so slowly? Don't they understand that this is important? They say they've never built anything like this before. Don't be stupid, I say, it's just a room. Hemingway had one.

ZELDA: Bang bang bang. I don't know what the hell she's building up there, but I swear it's never going to be finished. Hauling all kinds of junk up the stairs, creak, creak, creak. First she asks me to shut up, then she turns this into a construction zone. But she can't make me leave. I'm not going nowhere. No, no, no. And I've given up on complaining. That's just one more noise. If I start complaining, she'll just say, why don't you move somewhere else? She's not saying that to me. I live here. She can't complain about me.

(They approach each other at the door.)

ZELDA: Hi, Elisa.

ELISA: Hi, Zelda.

ZELDA: Saw the men packing up. They finally finished?

ELISA: I know it seemed like a long time. I'm sorry for all the noise.

ZELDA: It wasn't a problem.

ELISA: It should be much quieter around here now.

ZELDA: That's great.

(Back to their chairs.)

ZELDA: Much quieter.

ELISA: It's just what I wanted. Maybe I can finally get a little work done.

Do a little writing, a little reading. It's like a fantasy.

ZELDA: Very quiet.

ELISA: It takes a little getting used to. When I walk into the Quiet Room, the pressure is suddenly lifted from my mind. Not a single sound comes through from the outside. Peace. Absolute peace.

ZELDA: She's too quiet, really. Quieter than me. I mean, I'm awful quiet now, I keep my shoes off, so I don't clonk around the kitchen floor. Every step is measured. I sit right next to the TV, probably burning my eyes out, just so I don't have to turn it up too loud. I put on the closed captioning, so I can read along. I opened up my microwave and my washing machine and took out the wires that make 'em beep. But now she wants to one-up me. Because I don't hear a whisper from her anymore. Though I can't seem to lose her from my mind. Always wondering what she hears.

ELISA: I'm just an ordinary woman, of modest means, but nothing has ever made me feel as rich as this. Silence. Some people save up to buy a new car, I saved up to buy silence. I have to take out the computer, because the fan is too loud. Anything mechanical makes a sound. I even have to leave my watch outside. The ticking is like jackhammer.

ZELDA: Don't slide the chair, pick it up and set it down. Gently. Like it's in slow motion. She's not going to outquiet me. No. I don't think so. Not me.

ELISA: I have to get rid of the notebook and pen. I thought a fountain pen might do the trick, but it just scratches, scratches, scratches. Like fingernails on a blackboard. I was going to read. A big stack of books. All I'll hear is the author's voice coming off the page. That's all. The author's voice. Lose myself in the story. But the rustling of the turning pages is sharp as a knife. I try hand lotion. I try turning the pages very slowly. Nothing works.

ZELDA: I've given up showers, because they're just too loud. I can fill the tub very slowly. A small stream of water makes almost no sound, though it's not very hot when I'm done. She'll never hear me.

ELISA: I sit here listening for some weakness in the sound proofing, but it's flawless. I am the only flaw. A mote of sound. I'm filled with sound. My stomach gurgles. I swallow and I can't believe that it's not shaking the house.

ZELDA: I don't hear them at all anymore. From here I can see out the window, and I know that the husband is gone. He took the kids and hasn't come back. But her car hasn't moved. She's still up there. But I'm not giving her anything, nothing to hear.

ELISA: I had to turn out the light. I could hear the filament burning. It's very dark in here, no windows, not even a crack under the perfectly sealed door. It's empty. I've taken everything out, everything but me. I've worked on my breathing, careful, regular breaths, mouth held slightly open.

ZELDA: She'll never hear me.

ELISA: Can you hear that pounding? Can you hear that? My heart. My heart. But there seems to be nothing I can do about my heart. My heart.

ZELDA: I've taken to being very still.

ELISA: They say the Zen monks can slow their heartbeats to almost nothing. It's all I think about.

ZELDA: If I don't move, then I don't creak the floor.

ELISA: All I ever think about.

ZELDA: If I just sit here in this chair...

ELISA: All I really wanted.

ZELDA: Pump pump pump

ELISA: All I ever wanted.

ZELDA: Pump. Pump. Pump.

ELISA: All I've been looking for, this entire time.

ZELDA: She'll never hear me.

ELISA: Just a little quiet.

ZELDA: Pump. Pump.

ELISA: And I finally found it.

ZELDA: Absolute

ELISA: Perfect

ELISA and ZELDA: Silence.

Lights out.

END OF SCENE

THE SKY IS FALLING

by
Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS

Samantha 20s-30s
Ricki 20s-30s, Samantha's older sister.
Jill 30s-50s, Samantha's guru.
Granny 60s, Samantha and Ricki's Grandma.
(It's a lot of fun to have this actress also play Jill.)

TIME: Present. A one-day period.

SETTING: A bare stage with a few stage cubes will work just fine.

AT RISE: *SAMANTHA kneels, head bowed, centerstage. Perhaps SHE has some sort of holy book open in front of her on the ground. SHE wears a hard hat. After a moment, JILL enters. SHE has an air of great holiness about her. SHE also wears a hard hat. At JILL's arrival, SAMANTHA bows even lower, almost flat on the ground, in supplication.*

JILL: Arise, my child.

SAMANTHA: Greetings, most holy mother, protector and guide. Ola pola mollola.

JILL: Jama haba banana.

SAMANTHA: Peace, always.

JILL: Peace. I called you here today, because I have to let you know. . .
Our faith is about to be rewarded.

SAMANTHA: I am ready.

JILL: After generations of waiting, the time has finally come. Our transports will arrive. . . tomorrow.

SAMANTHA: Tomorrow?

JILL: I wish that there had been more time to warn the congregation, but--

SAMANTHA: I know the holy book says that the day of reckoning and rapture will come soon, but I didn't really think that it meant. . . tomorrow.

JILL: Are you prepared?

SAMANTHA: I guess so. Almost. I will be. I will be. Tomorrow.

JILL: You'll be fine. We'll all be fine. Not many people have the chance to see a prophecy fulfilled. Let alone one like this. You will be at the core of a new human race. You must enter the mother ship with an open mind and a fresh heart. If you have any earthly business that must be resolved, now is the time. I know we were all supposed to have said our goodbyes when we entered the loving embrace of Ethu, but some farewells are harder than others.

SAMANTHA: I'm glad you understand.

JILL: Do you want me to come with you?

SAMANTHA: No. I'll be fine.

JILL: May Goddess protect and speed you. Don't be late.

SAMANTHA: I don't suppose they'll wait.

JILL: Not an extra second.

(JILL exits. Lights shift onto RICKI who crawls on stage, with a shoe raised high in the air. SHE's stalking a spider. SAMANTHA watches her.)

RICKI: Stupid, nasty, scummy spider. I ought to just pull off a leg or two and send you to your buddies as a warning. It's wonderful, all the bugs you catch, the beautiful webs you weave, but not in my house. This is an arachnid-free zone. Maybe I'll just stick your body to the baseboard. Say goodbye, you little--

SAMANTHA: Don't.

(RICKI startles at the sound of SAMANTHA's voice, looks at her, then slams the shoe down on the spider.)

RICKI: What are you doing here?

SAMANTHA: I needed to see you.

RICKI: Did you escape?

SAMANTHA: There's nothing to escape from. I'm with Her Holiness completely of my own free will.

RICKI: I suppose that should be some sort of a relief. Except that apparently you haven't so much as called me in more than two years, all of your own free will. Where's your robes?

SAMANTHA: They generated too much negative energy among the population. We felt it was important to do a better job blending.

RICKI: And the hard hat?

SAMANTHA: The sky is falling.

RICKI: I never really thought of Chicken Little as a cult story, but I guess, if you think about it...

SAMANTHA: I know it all sounds stupid to you.

RICKI: Not just stupid. Crazy. Whacko. Idiotic. Weird. But that's fine, we all have our quirks. We don't necessarily build our entire lives around them, but we all have them.

SAMANTHA: This is important to me. I wish you would not belittle my choices.

RICKI: You're right. It's your life. Live it however you want. I apologize.

SAMANTHA: Apology accepted.

(An awkward silence. RICKI spots another spider.)

RICKI: If you'll excuse me, I have spiders to smash. Son of a bitch. They're everywhere. Come to Ricki, Mr. Spider. Your days in my house have reached their end.

SAMANTHA: Please don't.

RICKI: You don't live here anymore. You went off to join swami what's-her-name and eat rice and chant mantras. I am here, I take care of things, these are my spiders. And I don't want them.

(SHE SLAMS down the shoe and exterminates another spider. SAMANTHA puts her hands together and says a prayer for the spider.)

SAMANTHA: Mider bider spalider, amen.

RICKI: It's just a spider.

SAMANTHA: The Goddess values all living things.

RICKI: Good for her. That's her job. They give me the creeps.

SAMANTHA: I came to say goodbye.

RICKI: You've been doing that since you were sixteen years old. I stay, you go, it's the natural order of things. Just like spiders in my house get squashed with my shoe.

SAMANTHA: That was the worst thing about Mom and Dad. . . Not getting to say goodbye.

RICKI: An instantaneous loss like that, it leaves a vacuum, and it sucks up everything. Everything good, everything real, all the workings of your heart.

SAMANTHA: Don't you think you would have handled it better if they'd had a chance to, you know, say "Goodbye, don't worry about me." Something like that?

RICKI: Maybe.

SAMANTHA: Is Grandma here? I need to say goodbye to her, too.

RICKI: Granny! Samantha's here!

(GRANNY, an old woman using a walker or cane, enters. SHE smiles vaguely at SAMANTHA.)

GRANNY: Who's this?

RICKI: It's Samantha.

GRANNY: I thought she shaved her head when she ran off and joined that cult. And they made her dress funny, too. What's that on your head? Did you hurt yourself? Are you all right? What happened to her head?

RICKI: The sky is falling.

SAMANTHA: It's a symbol of our need for vigilance and protection.

GRANNY: Protection against what?

SAMANTHA: The sky is falling.

GRANNY: Don't try to play tricks on me.

SAMANTHA: I came to say goodbye, Grandma.

GRANNY: What's she talking about?

RICKI: I have no idea.

GRANNY: Where are you going?

SAMANTHA: Away. Far away. And I can't come back.

GRANNY: Why not?

SAMANTHA: I'm going away with the Elect, on a spaceship, tomorrow.

GRANNY: On a spaceship. Did she just say she's going on a spaceship?

RICKI: Oh, Lord.

GRANNY: I'm old, but I'm not stupid. What's the name of this boy? Why don't you just bring him by to meet us instead of telling crazy stories like this?

SAMANTHA: It's not a crazy story. Well, maybe it is, but it's still true. And it doesn't really matter if you believe it. I just wanted you to know that I'll bring my memories of you with me, across the galaxy. I'll be fine and I don't want you to worry about me.

(SAMANTHA gives GRANNY a big hug, just about knocking her over.)

GRANNY: Careful. I'm an old woman. I suppose you know what the heck you're doing. But I wish you wouldn't go. I don't have much time left here myself, and I wish I could spend more of it with you. At least Ricki's always been here, but you. . . I don't even remember the last time I saw you. Can't you stay with us a little longer?

SAMANTHA: I wish I could. But it's not up to me.

GRANNY: A shame. You were a good child. You always had a sense about you, like somehow you could see beyond the surface, see underneath the disguises we use to hide ourselves. But if you have to

go, you have to go. I always wished that I could go to the stars. Buck Rogers wasn't just for boys, you know. Stay here, I want to get you something for your trip.

(GRANNY exits.)

SAMANTHA: How's she been?

RICKI: She's old. Sometimes I think a strong cold snap will kill her off. Other times I think she'll live to be a hundred.

SAMANTHA: Can you leave her by herself?

RICKI: Not for long.

SAMANTHA: Just for tonight. I wondered if you would... it's hard to say goodbye to everything, everyone. So hard. I wondered if you'd. . . if you'd think about coming with me, until I go.

RICKI: I can't just--

(GRANNY enters.)

GRANNY: I'm fine. Just tell Mrs. Schwartz to check on me every once in a while. Go with your sister.

RICKI: But I really should stay with--

GRANNY: I'm not an infant. Don't use me as an excuse, one that you'll regret and resent. **(to SAMANTHA)** Now here--

(SHE pulls some tin foil out of her pocket, takes off SAMANTHA's helmet, and carefully spreads the foil over her head, and replaces the hard hat.)

GRANNY: I don't know much about space aliens, but everything I've read and seen in the movies says that their little brain rays can't travel through the metal.

SAMANTHA: Thanks, Grandma.

GRANNY: I'm glad someone in this family is finally going to see the world. Even if it's not this one. Make sure you mind your manners--you have an entire planet to represent.

(GRANNY exits.)

SAMANTHA: Come help me say goodbye, to everything.

RICKI: All that's left is for you to say goodbye to brown rice and chanting, right? I can't be much help there.

SAMANTHA: I haven't forgotten about the world. And I want to make sure I never will. Please. It's the last time I'll ever ask you for anything.

RICKI: Sure. Until you ask me to forget that you ever did any of this crap.

SAMANTHA: Let's go!

(They pull two cubes center stage and are now driving in a car. SAMANTHA'S driving. Way too fast. RICKI is petrified. During the driving scene the lights gradually fade and stars come on overhead.)

RICKI: Samantha.

SAMANTHA: Yeeha!

RICKI: Slow down.

SAMANTHA: I can go even faster.

RICKI: Slow down!

SAMANTHA: Watch this.

RICKI: You'll get us both killed and you will miss the Rapture. How long has it been since you've done anything fun?

SAMANTHA: Look, no hands.

(RICKI grabs the wheel.)

RICKI: I am not enjoying this. I am not enjoying this.

SAMANTHA: You were never any fun.

RICKI: Au contraire. I was the fun one. You were the one with your nose in a book. It's just that I grew up, that's all.

SAMANTHA: We're here.

(They get out of the car.)

RICKI: Thank goodness. Can we rest now?

SAMANTHA: No. We need to find the pickup spot.

RICKI: Aren't you exhausted yet? The circus, softball, the museum, a movie, restaurant, ice skating, horse racing, mud wrestling, snake charmers, tequila bar. I've had about all I can take.

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