

CAST (2 women, 2 men)

Elena, a woman in her late 40's

Sam, an inert man, late 40's

Young Woman, early 20's

Young Man, early 20's

A room suggestive of an intensive care unit in a hospital. Clinical, spare.
The bed should be on locking casters and highly mobile.
The area is bright and airy, timeless and endless.

The time is the late Seventies, but only the music need reflect that.

And therefore who would cry out to the petals on the ground
To stay,
Knowing as we must, how the vivacity of *what was*
Is married to the vitality of *what will be*.

Mary Oliver
Lines Written in the Days of Growing Darkness

ACT ONE:

ELENA in a bright white room. She wears sunglasses, a coat, and a fetching scarf. She has a suitcase. The sound of life support machines. She stares at the unmoving man in the bed. She stares.

Mechanical breathing. Staring. Breathing.

ELENA

Shit.

ELENA exits.

Mechanical breathing.

Finally, finally, ELENA enters, rolling her suitcase behind her. She has removed her scarf and sunglasses. Maybe there's a faded blue privacy curtain around the hospital bed, which SAM is laying in, motionless. There is a chair and a small table. Except for the soft beep and buzz of hospital machinery it's quiet. She takes it in. Mechanical breathing.

She goes to his bedside, tries to find an unbroken, place to touch him. It's too much.

ELENA (cont'd)

You can hear me. I know you can hear me. I'm here. Whatever you need to do, what ever you need. It's okay. You're going to be okay. That's all you need to think about. Nothing else.

Mechanical breathing.

ELENA (cont'd)

I know you're listening. Oh who knows, but I think you're still in there and you can hear me and how worthless I sound right now but I'm going to keep talking. I'm going to make familiar sounds and maybe sing, okay? I'm going to sing a song for you.

(pause)

I can only sing when someone else starts.

A machine starts beeping insistently.

ELENA (cont'd)

Is that supposed to be beeping? I don't know what it means, the beeping.

(calling out)

Someone? Can someone please--? Help.

(to machine)

Stop!

The beeping stops. His breathing. She remembers a song in the key of the beeping, The Carpenter's 'Close to You'.

Why do birds
Suddenly appear
Everytime
You are near
Just like me/Just like me
They long to be
Close to you
(beat)

That was entirely lame.

(beat)

You have no idea. How many times I've pretended this. Wished this. You like this. Not a car accident, oh god. Not some vindictive hope, not spite. More like a kind of chicken-shit compassion: I didn't want to be the one that hurt you. It became a kind of prayer. Spare him. From pain. From me. I didn't want to derail your life and send you hurtling into the helpless air.

(Pause, then singing:)

On the day that you were born the angels got together
And decided to create a dream come true
So they sprinkled gold dust in your hair
And golden starlight in your eyes of blue-oooh-oooh-oooh

Wake up wake up wake up wake up. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

She pulls the privacy curtain around them. The machines hum and beep.

YOUNG WOMAN and YOUNG MAN arrive, bearing "Get Well" balloons, flowers, a teddy bear. Young Man opens the privacy curtain. ELENA is laying on the bed, asleep. SAM lays motionless.

YOUNG MAN

Look at that.

YOUNG WOMAN

Don't wake them.

YOUNG MAN

I wouldn't. Christ.

YOUNG WOMAN

Just keep your voice down.
Look at that.

YOUNG MAN

Christ.

YOUNG WOMAN

I can't look. God, oh god.

She turns away. He holds her.

YOUNG MAN

Hey. It's going to be okay.

YOUNG WOMAN

I just can't believe it.

YOUNG MAN

Ssh. Take a breath.

YOUNG WOMAN

How is he still alive?

YOUNG MAN

Stubborn.

YOUNG WOMAN

It was her fault, the other driver! She was drunk, I think. She's a barmaid somewhere. Driving her boyfriend's car-- some tank, didn't hardly dent it. She crossed over into his lane, with the rain he didn't even see her coming. Hit him straight on, bam! Smashed the car like an accordion, sent him flying into a ditch thirty feet from the road.

YOUNG MAN

No seat belt?

She gives him a pained look.

YOUNG WOMAN

Both his legs broken, both arms, left rib cage shattered, punctured lung, banged up his heart, his liver, his spleen.

YOUNG MAN

Christ. What a thing to wake up to.

YOUNG WOMAN

If he wakes up.

YOUNG MAN

(re: Elena)

How did she find out?

YOUNG WOMAN

Paramedics called Jeneen and I guess she came over and told her.

YOUNG MAN

(indicating Elena)

They didn't call her?

YOUNG WOMAN

She didn't answer.

YOUNG MAN

What the hell?

YOUNG WOMAN

I know. Oh god I just want to...

(burying her face into his chest. Pause)

What's that smell?

YOUNG MAN

(guilty)

What smell?

YOUNG WOMAN

Have you been...oh my god. You have.

YOUNG MAN

What?

YOUNG WOMAN

I can't believe it.

YOUNG MAN

What?

YOUNG WOMAN

I smell it on you.

YOUNG MAN

You do not-- Really?

YOUNG WOMAN

You're stoned.

YOUNG MAN

I am not stoned.

YOUNG WOMAN

You are, you've been smoking!

YOUNG MAN

I am not *stoned*.

YOUNG WOMAN

You told me you stopped. *You told me that.*

YOUNG MAN

Well, I did, for that period of time.

YOUNG WOMAN

You said you would at least try.

YOUNG MAN

I did try, and I did *not* like not smoking weed. It relaxes me.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why do you need to be relaxed?

YOUNG MAN

I don't do it a lot, what's the big deal?

YOUNG WOMAN

I can't trust you.

YOUNG MAN

It's not heroin. I'm not stealing things.

YOUNG WOMAN

You disappear.

YOUNG MAN

You over-react.

YOUNG WOMAN

No, you don't get to say that! You smoke a joint and you're not there anymore, you're an echo. Everything's fine and nothing matters but it's not really you-- it's you in a tunnel.

YOUNG MAN

Oh come off it.

YOUNG WOMAN

You do it so you don't have to deal.

YOUNG MAN

What am I not *dealing* with?

YOUNG WOMAN

It keeps you in just enough of a fog. San Francisco in June!

YOUNG MAN

It *relaxes* me. That's all.

YOUNG WOMAN

Then why don't you stop?

YOUNG MAN

Because I like the way it makes me feel.

YOUNG WOMAN

Because you can't.

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)

Because you're addicted. You don't know what it's doing, you're not you when you're stoned. I don't want you to-- it scares me. I don't know who you are and it scares me. It scares me!

YOUNG MAN

I don't want to. I like it. Who is it hurting if I smoke a joint every now and then? A few hits. I'm not hurting anybody. I'm not walking around stoned. Why? Why are you scared? Why are you scared?

ELENA

(waking)

Why are you *here*? For godssake, take your fight and go. Goddamn go!

YOUNG WOMAN

We're sorry.

YOUNG MAN

We're sorry.

They go to Elena at the bedside.

YOUNG WOMAN

How is he?

YOUNG MAN

How are *you*?

*Elena refers to a clipboard, thick with
paperwork.*

ELENA

They want to know who to notify in case of emergency, next of kin. They want to know so many things.

YOUNG WOMAN

How long have you been here?

ELENA

I don't.

(beat)

I made a stew. His favorite. It was the least I could do. More of a hearty American goulash, everything in it. That and a nice salad, ice berg lettuce, shredded carrots, croutons, the works.

YOUNG MAN

Very thoughtful.

ELENA

Guilt made me a good cook when nothing else could. I made it ahead of time, so that it would be there when he got home. Something would be there. It was the least I could do.

YOUNG WOMAN

You couldn't have known.

YOUNG MAN

It's the last thing you think.

YOUNG WOMAN

Any word on his condition?

ELENA

No.

Mechanical breathing.

YOUNG MAN

(a positive side)

He would have enjoyed it. The meal you made. You're a terrific cook.

YOUNG WOMAN

She is a great cook. Everything I know about cooking I learned from her.

(pause; searching)

YOUNG MAN

(re: Young Woman)

She is an amazing cook. I look in the fridge and see nothing edible; she looks in there and somehow an entire meal comes out. Incredible. My hat's off to you both. Now if only we could eat before nine at night.

YOUNG WOMAN

It's never that late.

YOUNG MAN

(to Elena, enjoying it)

She makes me wait for it.

YOUNG WOMAN

No. Not on purpose.

ELENA

(she knows different)

No.

Mechanical breathing.

YOUNG WOMAN

How are you?

ELENA

I was all ready to go. Down to my sunglasses and scarf. I was ready.

YOUNG MAN

Why don't I take your coat?

She clutches her coat around her.

ELENA

Always the gentleman. And so charming.

She moves away from him.

YOUNG MAN

It's lucky you were there.

YOUNG WOMAN

What if you hadn't been there? What if you'd already left to go shopping or whatever.

ELENA

I wasn't going shopping, dear.

YOUNG MAN

But you were going somewhere.

ELENA

Yes. Yes I was. But then the phone rang. It rang and rang, and rang.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why don't you answer your phone? What if it was important?

YOUNG MAN

It *was* important.

ELENA

There was a knock at the door. I was wondering 'how did I suddenly get so popular?' But it was just Jeneen. She stood there, mouth moving, nothing coming out, like a hooked fish.

YOUNG MAN

The paramedics sent her, they couldn't find you.

YOUNG WOMAN

They called.

ELENA

Evidently.

YOUNG WOMAN

If you would ever *answer your phone*.

ELENA

Why would I start now?

YOUNG WOMAN

God.

ELENA

I waited for her to speak. She just stood there with that face. That face said everything I needed to know. Shit. I think that's what I said to her. I knew it was Sam and that something had happened and that it was not good. It isn't good.

YOUNG MAN

Is that what they're saying?

ELENA

You need a second opinion?

YOUNG WOMAN

You don't need to be so-- so...

ELENA

Obvious?

YOUNG WOMAN

God!

YOUNG MAN

(to Young Woman)

It's okay.

YOUNG WOMAN

She's *impossible*.

YOUNG MAN

She's in a state.

Young Man and Woman watch Elena watch Sam.

ELENA

That man was so charming. He was effortlessly interesting and patient and charming. Really, he charmed everyone-- the pants off me, I can tell you that much.

YOUNG MAN

Too much information.

YOUNG WOMAN

(to Elena)

Don't say that, don't say it like he isn't here anymore.

ELENA

I didn't say that.

YOUNG WOMAN

You just said it, you said he *was* charming.

ELENA

I meant he isn't charming anymore. Or patient. He hasn't been for years. Doesn't even bother trying. I can't say I blame him. Look at that. Our marriage is broken, shattered like his arms and legs. Collapsed like his left lung.

YOUNG WOMAN

(whisper)

He might hear you.

ELENA

Do you really think he can hear anything?

YOUNG WOMAN

We don't know.

ELENA

(too loud)

Sam, you there?

YOUNG MAN

Christ.

YOUNG WOMAN

You don't know.

ELENA

Nothing to be done. Nothing at all.

YOUNG MAN

(re: suitcase)

You were...planning a trip?

ELENA

Bingo.

YOUNG WOMAN

Where? Without him? Why?

ELENA

Don't be stupid. You're not stupid.

(referring to paperwork)

"Relationship to patient".

(beat)

Dwindling.

YOUNG WOMAN

(trying)

I have news for you. Good news.

ELENA

Oh?

YOUNG WOMAN

We're engaged.

(Young Man and Young Woman embrace)

He asked me last night-- though you didn't actually have a ring.

YOUNG MAN

(happy)

I didn't really think it through.

YOUNG WOMAN

We are, though, we're engaged. It's official.

ELENA

Congratulations.

YOUNG WOMAN

We're excited.

ELENA

I can see that.

YOUNG WOMAN

Well why shouldn't we be?

ELENA

I didn't say--

YOUNG WOMAN

Don't. Don't ruin it for me. Let me be happy.

ELENA

You are. You're happy. I'm happy for you. For both of you.

YOUNG WOMAN

Are you?

ELENA

Be happy.

YOUNG WOMAN

Thank you.
(pause)

YOUNG MAN

(to Elena)
Where were you going?

ELENA

I was leaving, dear. Walking out the door-- twenty years late, but oh well. I was doing it. Except I suddenly wasn't, because the phone rang. Because of technology, or fate, or *God* (if Mother had anything to do with it).

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't understand. You were just going to what-- walk away? From your marriage?

ELENA

You would have me crawl on my belly?

YOUNG MAN

What the hell?

ELENA

Walking, after all these years, those year, walking with something akin to purpose toward the great unknown.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why? Why now?

ELENA

Why now? What a good question. I thought about it for so long, I think I plotted and planned myself into inaction. Today was simply the day I could do it.

YOUNG WOMAN

Not now. Now everything's changed.

ELENA

Has it?

YOUNG WOMAN

What are you going to do now?

ELENA

I'm not going rely on the support of family, that's abundantly clear!

YOUNG MAN

Have you been drinking?

ELENA

I'm done with this-- with you, with him!

YOUNG WOMAN

(indicating Sam)

What about *him*?

ELENA quickly exits with her suitcase.

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)

It can't happen like this. She can't leave him now! How will he live like this?

YOUNG MAN

If he lives.

YOUNG WOMAN

If he lives?

YOUNG MAN

(lowering his voice)

Isn't that where we are?

YOUNG WOMAN

What are we supposed to do? She's not even *trying*.

YOUNG MAN

She's in shock.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why are you making excuses for her?

YOUNG MAN

Probably better if he didn't. I don't mean that how it sounds. I mean I can't imagine. That's what I mean. That's what it is.

YOUNG WOMAN

It's all awful. We have to do something. You have to talk to her.

YOUNG MAN

What am I going to say?

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't know! Stay with him then.

YOUNG MAN

(panicked)
I'll talk to her.

YOUNG WOMAN

No-- *talk to him.*

YOUNG WOMAN exits. YOUNG MAN looks for a way out, then approaches Sam's bedside.

YOUNG MAN

Hey.

Mechanical breathing. Pause.

You hanging in there?

He goes to the bedside, tries to be casual; maybe he accidentally hits a button or lever and lowers the bed. Fumbles, corrects it. Settles in. Kind of forgets where he is.

What happened to your Angels this year? They don't look so good right about now. Not at all. Not like last year, last year nobody could touch them-- til they got to the playoffs anyway. This year they pretty much stink. I don't think they're going to get anywhere. How does that happen? They were solid going in, superior offense, intelligent defense, everything lined up just right-- then it all fell apart. Nobody can explain

that to me, how that happens. It's just the game.

(remembers where he is)

When you're feeling better we should go. Maybe they'll be better. Maybe they'll win one. Doesn't matter if they win. It's the game, right?

YOUNG WOMAN enters briskly.

YOUNG MAN (cont'd)

Did she say anything?

YOUNG WOMAN

Go to Hell.

YOUNG MAN

I was *asking*.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's what she said, go to Hell. After she called me a selfish little bitch who doesn't know her head from a hole in the ground who has no idea what she's in for.

YOUNG MAN

What does that even mean?

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't know what it means. I don't know what it means.

YOUNG MAN

A head and a hole in the ground. It's a pretty incongruous comparison.

YOUNG WOMAN

What are we supposed to do?

YOUNG MAN

Do..?

YOUNG WOMAN

How do we do this?

YOUNG MAN

(re: Sam)

Him, you mean?

YOUNG WOMAN

Him, her, this. All of it. *Us*. I don't know how to do this-- I'm not prepared, I'm too young! It isn't fair.

(MORE)

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)

(beat)
Say something.

YOUNG MAN

It isn't fair.

YOUNG WOMAN

(upset)
I know that. Something else!

He is trying hard to think of what else he might say. Something positive, something true. He makes a couple of stabs at it, then falls silent.

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)

Why are you like this?

ELENA enters. YOUNG WOMAN will not give her the satisfaction of seeing her tears.

ELENA

I thought you would, if not approve, at least *understand*. Of all people.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why would I understand?

ELENA

I know I'm selfish. You, on the other hand, are *oblivious*. You have no idea how self-centered you are.

YOUNG WOMAN

Well, thank you awfully for bringing it to my attention.

YOUNG MAN

That's what family is for.

ELENA

You're an inconsiderate brat and it's high time you owned up to it.

YOUNG WOMAN

That is unfair and untrue! I'm here, aren't I? As soon as I heard, I cancelled everything and got on the first plane out.

(to Young Man)
Didn't I?

YOUNG MAN

First plane.

ELENA

Get over yourself, dear. You're selfish. In the long run maybe it's a good thing. Free advice: accept it, embrace it, wear it like a crown; it'll save you years of shame. Probably help with that eating disorder as well.

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't have an eating disorder!

ELENA

Tell that to the dentist. How many veneers and crowns have you got in there now?

YOUNG WOMAN

You're a monster, you know that?

ELENA

What, did you think I wouldn't notice? Your incredible shrinking act. Isn't that what you wanted, my and everyone else's attention?

YOUNG WOMAN

It's because of *you*.

ELENA

The eating disorder you don't have?

YOUNG WOMAN

You enjoy it, don't you? Being horrible. You think it makes you powerful.

ELENA

Enjoy it..? I've never considered that. It's more of a habit I don't care to break. A not particularly enjoyable habit-- not something wonderful like smoking. No, it's more like biting your nails down to the bloody nerve. A satisfying nip, then throbbing ache for hours and days.

Young Woman hides her hands behind her back.

YOUNG WOMAN

Was that an apology?

ELENA

Maybe my being horrible is a *curse* put on me by my mother-- who could be a real witch.

YOUNG MAN

That sounded *nothing* like an apology.

ELENA

“You’re wicked”, she’d say, “a wicked daughter” . Of course I am, I said, *because you’re a witch!*

YOUNG WOMAN

(incredulous)

No! I don’t believe it. You said that?

ELENA

Eventually.

YOUNG WOMAN

That’s so good! Oh god, I would never say that!

ELENA

Oh yes you would. You will. There’s something about age that frees it up. You stop caring so much about how it sounds or what anyone thinks. You stop feeling guilty and embarrassed. When was the last time I was embarrassed? I can’t remember. You have to have an audience to be embarrassed. Nobody is watching anymore.

YOUNG MAN

That’s not true, you are still a very attractive woman--

ELENA

Say for my age and I will behead you. You see how it is? They start placing conditions and allowances on beauty. The handicappers change the odds and suddenly you look around and realize you’re in the ring with a bunch of *nags*. Grey mares all around, these are your peers.

YOUNG MAN

That’s what this is about? *Age*?

YOUNG MAN gives YOUNG WOMAN a knowing look.

ELENA

Oh grow up, *everything* is about age. You’re too young and then you’re too old-- there’s no such thing as *middle-age*.

Something begins to beep.

YOUNG MAN

He's beeping.

YOUNG WOMAN

(alarmed)

He's beeping?

YOUNG MAN

The *machine* is beeping.

YOUNG WOMAN

But he's still breathing?

YOUNG MAN

As far as I can tell.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why is it beeping?

ELENA

It's the monitor. It does that. They said not to worry.

YOUNG MAN

Should we? Should we worry?

ELENA

You worry when it stops.

The beeping stops; breathing stops. They watch Sam, waiting.

ELENA (cont'd)

(alarmed)

Say something funny.

YOUNG MAN

I...can't really think of--

ELENA

He would make a joke about this. He'd find a way. He liked his humor pitch black. Like his morning cup of Ethiopian coffee.

YOUNG MAN

Dark and bitter.

They watch, tense; then, we hear the mechanical breathing resume.

ELENA

Oh he's laughing his ass off in there, where ever he is!

(to Sam)

Aren't you, Sam?

YOUNG WOMAN

This isn't funny. How is this funny?

ELENA

The three of us, standing around like pilgrims without a ship.

YOUNG WOMAN

It isn't funny.

ELENA

He was funny. He made me laugh.

YOUNG WOMAN

Present tense.

YOUNG MAN

He *is* funny.

ELENA

Maybe he still is...just not with me.

YOUNG WOMAN

Maybe you just don't see it anymore.

ELENA

Maybe.

(re: Young Man)

He makes you laugh?

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh god, all the time.

ELENA

That's good. That's key.

YOUNG MAN

It's why she keeps me around.

YOUNG WOMAN

Well, that and other reasons...

YOUNG MAN

Big reasons.

*He grins; a delicious moment passes between
Young Man and Young Woman.*

ELENA

Hang on to that. Whatever you do, don't lose sight of that. In fact, forget marriage, forget children--

YOUNG WOMAN

Excuse me-?

ELENA

They're love killers, all of them. It can't be helped. What is that face?

YOUNG WOMAN

When did you get so cynical?

ELENA

Listen, marry him if you don't believe me, populate the world if you must, but just know this: the thing that drew you together, that chemical, intellectual, physical sorcery? It doesn't stand a chance in hell.

YOUNG MAN

Well *obviously* it changes.

YOUNG WOMAN

Obviously?

ELENA

It *disenegrates*.

YOUNG MAN

Here we go.

ELENA

The proximity, the niggling power plays, the covert accusations. The boredom.

YOUNG WOMAN

Really?

ELENA

And the *expectations*, oh god, the expectations alone are boric acid on butterfly wings! It's too much to expect it to survive much less thrive. It's too much.

YOUNG MAN

If that's what you believe.

YOUNG WOMAN

Yes, if you go into it with that kind of negativity--

ELENA

I didn't go in with negativity. Ignorance, maybe. Definitely naivete.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's *you*. That's not me.

ELENA

You think not?

(to Young Man)

She's hopeless. What about you?

YOUNG MAN

I really don't know, Elena.

ELENA

Ah ha, a realist! I knew I liked you.

YOUNG MAN

Your marriage isn't great, we get that. What does that have to do with us? We're different people, we think differently than you, we live in a different--

ELENA

Listen handsome, let me enlighten you. Ignorance assures nothing.

YOUNG WOMAN

We're not ignorant, we're *young*.

YOUNG MAN

Forewarned, forearmed.

ELENA

We'll see. You'll see. Soon enough.

YOUNG MAN

Thank you Polly Positive.

YOUNG WOMAN

(to Elena)

Perhaps *you* could learn a thing or two from *us*.

ELENA

Wouldn't that be something?

YOUNG MAN

Yes it would.

ELENA

Learning backward, that would be something.

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't understand. Did he *beat* you?

ELENA

Don't be ridiculous.

YOUNG WOMAN

Is he dating other women? In love with a man? Dealing child pornography?

ELENA

Are you finished?

YOUNG WOMAN

Where is this coming from?

ELENA

Never mind. It can't be helped.

YOUNG WOMAN

No, really. What the hell is your problem?

ELENA

You want something I can't give you.

YOUNG WOMAN

An answer?

ELENA

Understanding.

(beat)

We should have ended it when he stopped touching me.

Young Man walks away.

YOUNG WOMAN

Where are you going?

ELENA

Too much information?

YOUNG MAN

Just need some air.

ELENA

You're a smoker. I forget that. There's a balcony off the bathroom.

YOUNG MAN

A balcony?

ELENA

It's not a psych ward.

YOUNG MAN

(to Young Woman)

You need anything? A gun?

YOUNG MAN exits.

ELENA

What kind of idiot smokes in this day and age?

YOUNG WOMAN

You smoked.

ELENA

I started when it was still good for you.

YOUNG WOMAN

You were talking about, before-- after you were married, how he didn't...

ELENA

Hm?

YOUNG WOMAN

How he changed. Things between you changed?

ELENA

Within a year, it stopped, everything. No sex at all.

YOUNG WOMAN

Nothing?

ELENA

Nothing.
(beat)

YOUNG WOMAN

That's not a reason to-- I mean, that doesn't mean it's over.

ELENA

What does it mean?

YOUNG WOMAN

It means it's different.

ELENA

It was different. It was very different.
He came down with rheumaty fever. Rheumatic? Rheumatoid? I can't
ever remember.

YOUNG WOMAN

Rheumatic. Like Robert Burns.

ELENA

Who?

YOUNG WOMAN

The poet?

(isn't it obvious?)

O my Love's like a red, red rose?

(continues)

O my Love's like a red, red rose

That's newly sprung in June

O my Love's like the melodie

That's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,

So deep in love am I:

And I will love thee still, my dear,

Till a' the seas gang dry:

YOUNG WOMAN & ELENA

(enjoying this)

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun:

ELENA

I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

(joyous)

Oh aren't you clever? I forgot how clever you are!
That'll go too.
Yes, just like Robert Burns. Did he write about rheumatic fever?

YOUNG WOMAN

He *had* it.

ELENA

Tone.

YOUNG WOMAN

Sorry.

(beat)

You think the illness had something to do with..?

ELENA

Mm, so it would seem. He was laid up, completely out of commission, for months. He was in such pain.

YOUNG WOMAN

That must have been hard. For you.

ELENA

It probably was. But you expect difficulties, you cope, you look ahead, try to do what you have to do. And then he was better, only he wasn't and everything was different. He wasn't interested in me at any rate. I don't know what it was. I didn't know what to do, it wasn't something you talked about. But I liked sex.

YOUNG WOMAN

How old were you?

ELENA

It was right after we married, a little older than you.

YOUNG WOMAN

What did you do?

ELENA

I was devastated. But you hope for the best, or for better, you go on. I did, anyway. For too long.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why?

ELENA

I don't know. Gravity.

They watch Sam breathing.

ELENA (cont'd)

He was always handsome. Even now.

YOUNG WOMAN

At least he didn't lose his looks.

ELENA

Or get *hairy*.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh?

ELENA

That's the German. They are not a hairy people. There's a little Armenian in there.

YOUNG WOMAN

Armenian?

ELENA

Snuck in at some point. His nose.

YOUNG WOMAN

You wouldn't guess.

ELENA

It's got that nice strong arch.

YOUNG WOMAN

Mm.

ELENA

He didn't like to travel much.

YOUNG WOMAN

Doesn't.

ELENA

He *doesn't* like to travel. He stays close to home-- he's a Cancer. Me, I love to travel. I wanted to go to China.

YOUNG WOMAN

I want to go to China!

ELENA

He would rather stay home, painting fences, digging up stones in the pasture.

YOUNG WOMAN

You mean, like, a *farm*?

ELENA

Not a farm, not really. An acre, with animals. It was early in our marriage, you know this.

YOUNG WOMAN

No.

ELENA

Well he called it the farm.

YOUNG WOMAN

Like goats and sheep?

ELENA

We got rid of the sheep. They're stupid.

YOUNG WOMAN

Horses?

ELENA

Oh yes. And a pig named Gunther who was very sweet.

YOUNG WOMAN

You on a farm, shoveling pig shit? I can't imagine!

ELENA

Oh you're spoiled, spoiled rotten. The things I had to do, the chores.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh and I *didn't* do chores?

ELENA

Hardly.

YOUNG WOMAN

Try sweeping a driveway on a hot Saturday while your friends ride by on bikes-- on their way to the pool. And there's Billy Peaker, waving at you.

ELENA

Billy Peaker.

YOUNG WOMAN

He was a prick.

ELENA

Billy Peaker wasn't a prick. Not really.

YOUNG WOMAN

He egged our car and set our front door-mat on fire!

ELENA

He did-?

YOUNG WOMAN

Don't you remember?

ELENA

Because he liked you.

YOUNG WOMAN

He didn't like me.

ELENA

All through junior high and high school.

YOUNG WOMAN

He did not like me and I hated him.

ELENA

He told me, this was years later, he said he used to ride his bike outside our house at night and wait, hoping you would walk by the window. He just wanted a glimpse of you. Isn't that romantic?

YOUNG WOMAN

He told you that?

ELENA

He sent a valentine. It was very sweet.

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't remember any valentine.

ELENA

To *me*, not you. It was after you.

YOUNG WOMAN

When?

ELENA

What do you care? He was a prick.

YOUNG WOMAN

He *was* a prick. He got Tina White pregnant.

ELENA

That was his brother, that was Brett.

YOUNG WOMAN

No it wasn't Brett.

ELENA

No?

YOUNG WOMAN

Billy was with Tina. Don't you remember?

ELENA

Stop saying that! At any rate, they both liked you, all of them, there were boys all the time, and they *wanted* you.

YOUNG WOMAN

They wanted something.

ELENA

Prude.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm not a prude!

ELENA

You should have said yes more. You should have let them. Why not?

YOUNG WOMAN

Because I'm not a *whore*.

ELENA

There's still time.

YOUNG WOMAN

You disgust me.

(re: Sam)

What if he can hear all this?

ELENA

What difference does it make?

YOUNG WOMAN

Maybe you should go.

(pause)

I can't believe Billy Peaker sent *you* a valentine.

ELENA

He probably figured you were still sweeping that driveway.

YOUNG WOMAN

It was hard work.

ELENA

So you said.

YOUNG WOMAN

It took forever!

ELENA

Because you would stop every thirty seconds and daydream.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh I did. I was always being someone else, somewhere that wasn't where I was.

ELENA

Poor *Cinderella*.

YOUNG WOMAN

No, she was too passive. *Black Beauty*.

ELENA

Black Beauty, yes.

YOUNG WOMAN

I wanted to be that strong and fast and beautiful. I wanted to be in danger and escape magnificently.

ELENA

You would run around the playground, the boys chasing you. You'd say 'Run like the wind, Black Beauty', like you were riding the horse you were.

YOUNG WOMAN

No one ever caught me.

ELENA

Good for you!

YOUNG WOMAN

Unless I wanted them to. Like a handsome, gentle stranger.

ELENA

Who would adore you.

YOUNG WOMAN

Of course.

ELENA

Of course. Oh, to be adored.

YOUNG WOMAN

What's wrong with that, what's wrong with wanting to be adored?

ELENA

Nothing, not a thing.

YOUNG WOMAN

You gave up.

ELENA

I gave in.

YOUNG WOMAN

I won't. I won't give up.

ELENA

(caught up)

That's the spirit. Don't. Don't ever give up!

YOUNG MAN enters.

YOUNG WOMAN

(to him, abruptly)

I don't want to be trapped in a loveless marriage!

YOUNG MAN

(Whaat?)

Okay.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's what happens, it can't be helped!

YOUNG MAN

It's not what happens, it doesn't have to be. We're going to be different, babe.

YOUNG WOMAN

How? How will we be different?

YOUNG MAN

(to Elena)

What have you been *telling* her?

ELENA

Nothing she wouldn't find out on her own.

YOUNG MAN

How about you stay out of our relationship? How does that sound?

ELENA

Unrealistic?

YOUNG MAN

Try it anyway.

ELENA

Oh you're both hopeless.

YOUNG MAN

(to Young Woman)

Stop listening. Maybe she'll go.

ELENA

Where will I go?

YOUNG WOMAN

How will we be different?

YOUNG MAN

We will, we are.

YOUNG WOMAN

What's to keep us from going down the same hapless road, making the same stupid, thoughtless mistakes?

ELENA

I can hear you.

YOUNG WOMAN

Shush!

YOUNG MAN

When I was four and five and six my mother chained me to a tree.

(an explanation)

To keep me from running off.

ELENA

That explains so much.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's a terrible thing to do to a child, my god.

YOUNG MAN

I never got hit by a car. I never got lost or kidnapped.

YOUNG WOMAN

You were chained to a tree!

YOUNG MAN

I could still run around the tree. I could climb it. I picked up hand fulls of grass and threw it in the air just like any other kid.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's so sad and pathetic.

YOUNG MAN

You don't get it. I could have broken free! If I really wanted to I could have, easily.

YOUNG WOMAN

All those years, you stayed chained?

ELENA

What were you waiting for?

YOUNG MAN

One day I went outside and there was no chain. Just a beat-up sycamore and a bald patch of grass.

ELENA

She set you free.

YOUNG WOMAN

What did she do with the chain?

YOUNG MAN

It got hung on a wall in the garage, I don't know.

ELENA

For the next kid.

YOUNG WOMAN

A reminder? A warning?

YOUNG MAN

No, you're missing the point. I don't think fate is inevitable. Fate is fluid. Your life is what you decide in any given moment.

(pause)

YOUNG WOMAN

You were smoking weed out there weren't you.

YOUNG MAN

Christ.

ELENA

(accusingly)

I know what he's saying.

Young Man shrugs.

ELENA (cont'd)

You think I made this-- the accident, happen?

YOUNG WOMAN

What-? *How?*

ELENA

Is that it?

YOUNG MAN

Not the accident, not specifically.

YOUNG WOMAN

What, for the insurance money? *What are you saying?*

ELENA

(to Young Woman)

Shut up for just once. Go on, Handsome.

YOUNG MAN

This is only a theory, *my* theory.

ELENA

About *my* ploy.

YOUNG MAN

Life is a series of choices. Not choosing is also a choice.

ELENA

What did I choose? What did I *not* choose?

YOUNG MAN

I think the question is, what were you *waiting* for?

ELENA

Don't turn the scales on me! I wasn't waiting for *this*, for gods sake. Not this.

YOUNG MAN

Maybe not consciously.

ELENA

You're horrible!

YOUNG WOMAN

Leave her alone!

YOUNG MAN

Then what? If you wanted to go why didn't you?

ELENA

(to Young Man)

You try. Try leaving. Try it! What amount of miserable will justify walking out on your life? Do you have to be *mostly* miserable? Entirely? I don't *know* what I was waiting for or if that's even true. He couldn't *stand* me. Can you get that through your thick scull? He can't stand me and he will never leave me! This is how long it took. It was him. It was me. This is what it took.

(she picks up the paperwork)

I have to finish this. They want to know so many things and I don't have the answers!

(beat)

I don't leave, do I?

Young Man goes to her and gently helps her out of her coat.

YOUNG WOMAN

No, you have to go.

YOUNG MAN

No she--

YOUNG WOMAN

She *has* to leave-- you have to!

YOUNG MAN

Leave her alone.

YOUNG WOMAN

She's unhappy, don't you see? Don't you care?

YOUNG MAN

What about him? That's who this should be about. What if he dies?

YOUNG WOMAN

What if he *lives*? Oh god, I can't believe I said that. It would be awful for both of them, that's what I'm saying!

YOUNG MAN

We don't know that.

ELENA

I think we do. I think we know that.