

# With Love and a Major Organ

by: Julia Lederer

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## Critical acclaim for WITH LOVE AND A MAJOR ORGAN and Julia Lederer:

“Explored with considerable charm...Lederer’s dialogue is laced with sophisticated poetry and wry insight into the isolation faced by a generation.”

- Philip Brandes, The Los Angeles Times

“Theatre that lets go of realism and embraces the joys of language....wonderfully weird, piercingly poetic and unexpectedly moving ... Isn’t that what theatre should do?”

- Hank Sartin, Crain’s Chicago

“A brash, poetic and fiercely original voice that’s equal parts pee-your-pants funny and get-out-that-Kleenex poignant...Keep your eye on Lederer, whose got huge potential. NNNNN/5”

- Glenn Sumi, NOW Magazine (Toronto)

“[A] show that stands out above the others... just about perfect... rises to a rare level of universal truth, all while making us laugh. A lot.”

- Christopher Kidder-Mostrom, NewCity Stage (Chicago)

“ [F]unny, insightful, and end[s] up saying much more about the heart and human interaction than simply being a quirky, poetically symbolic love story...an intricate dance of feeling and separation, empathy and distance, enthusiastic embracing of the world and deadened indifference to input...What then could be more important than seeing a play like “With Love and a Major Organ,” with its insistence that one’s heart, in real time, is central to everything.”

- Frances Baum Nicholson, The Daily Breeze (Los Angeles)

“Lederer has a deliciously twisted way with words... genuinely original... a dead sprint and the end result is pure elation mixed with a bit of dry heaving.”

- Kevin Greene, Chicago Stage Standard

“Delightfully absurd...endlessly quotable...poetic, playful, and wholly original...It’s Lederer’s lyrical flights of fancy that are the revelation here...worth lining up hours to see. \*\*\*\*\*/5.”

- Steve Fisher, Torontoist

“Julia Lederer is a writer with a delightfully original voice.”

- Karen Frickner, The Toronto Star.

**Characters:**

SUBWAY RIDER (Anabel): Wears a purple plaid jacket.

MONA: George's mother. Wears muted colours.

GEORGE: Black jacket.

**Notes:**

All characters can be played by actors of any ethnicity and diversity is encouraged.

The sounds and references to public transit are specific to Toronto's transit system, and may be adjusted to reflect the city in which the play is being produced.

There are several quick shifts between the Subway Rider's room and the subway, particularly in the first scene. These "snaps" and "shifts" should be quick, clear, and technically simple.

## Prologue

*The sound of a heart beat...*

MONA: There once was a boy with a heart made of paper. He wasn't born that way; it was a preventative measure, a decision made by his mother when he was still too young to decide for himself. Like when children have their tonsils taken out. It was so he'd be able to survive.

The boy was conceived by two broken-hearted people. Like two stray cats who had become lost, they had given their hearts to others, only to get them back in pieces. They barely spoke, mostly whimpered.

She didn't even remember his name.

Two broken-hearted people will make a broken hearted child together.

Like two red heads will make another carrot top.

So the little boy was pre-disposed to have his heart ripped to shreds.

Which was a thought his mother could not bear.

She called doctors, naturopaths, and all kinds of healers, but no one would listen. She said her son needed a new heart, and they tossed long words at her like hardballs and watched her crumple.

They told her how many people needed heart transplants to survive.

But she didn't give up.

She loved her son with every splintered shard in her chest. Effusively.

Her emotions grew from her like branches reaching straight to him.

In all other directions they were just decorations; numb as skulls.

But with regards to him...

She wouldn't take no for an answer.

So she saw a different kind of doctor. A Doctor of Philosophy.

And he had this idea. A simple idea no medical doctor had come up with.

To build a lighter model. People get prosthetic limbs all the time.

And so they consulted a Doctor of Fine Arts— who worked with paper.

And an architect made a blue print.

And the Doctor of Fine Arts made a model.

And the Doctor of Philosophy made an argument.

And they searched for someone to make it happen.

And a young surgeon who wanted so badly to be noticed said yes. And.

That was that. Her son would be fine. And he was fine, forever after.

*Light fades out.*

*In a different place:*

GEORGE     It takes eleven minutes for my body to wake up in the morning.  
 After my brain, which is on like a switch.  
 For my body, I have a system.  
 I start with my fingers. Then my arms.  
 Then I multitask and do my legs while drinking black coffee, which  
 I drink in bed.  
 My bed spread is plastic wrapped so there's no need to worry if  
 my hands aren't fully awake and working with complete precision.  
 I wouldn't bother with my toes, they're so small and no one  
 can see them inside heavy leather shoes, but I need them to walk to  
 the subway. I wake up my toes while I'm brushing my teeth.  
 Three and half teeth for each toe.  
 And that's all I need. So I go.

*The sound of a heartbeat that gets faster and louder.*

SR            Shhh. Shhh! This is getting... *(deep breaths)*. OK.  
*(talking to herself/heart)* I need you to settle down.

*SUBWAY RIDER/ANABEL puts on a purple plaid jacket. This muffles the beating sound.*

SR            My heart has started beating so loudly that sometimes I wonder if  
 other people can hear it.  
 Louder than their audio books, their music, their spinning brains.  
 My heart.  
 Beating away. Like I'm a busker playing my feelings on the subway  
 platform, in a movie theatre, in my cubicle at work.  
 Heart strings.

So, I went to see a therapist.  
 I asked her to listen to my heart.  
 She said that she wasn't allowed to touch me.  
 It crossed the boundaries of our relationship.  
 I asked her to define "boundaries."  
 She asked me about my mother.  
 I said, "I don't think my heart issue is hereditary."  
 She said, "All issues are somewhat hereditary.  
 Now tell me about your mother. Remember, I have a degree."

SR

My mother.

My mother told me her heart was like a ball of yarn.

That it would get caught on other people—on a backpack zipper, a large hoop earring, one of those buttons that reads “VOTE.”

They wouldn't realise her attachment, and they'd move further and further away.

The more the distance that grew between them, the more she'd unravel. More and more yarn got snagged, pulled out, until she was tangled everywhere.

Her feelings in knots all over town.

She said it was humiliating. I thought it sounded sort of pretty.

Public art.

And my therapist said “Hmmm.” But in a profound way.

Like someone who has a degree.

So, I kept talking. About how I feel everything.

About how I want to put my ear to people's chests.

Instead of a sweaty handshake. Instead of half-hearted wave.

Or a text. Of a heart shaped emoji, not even anatomically accurate.

Not accurate at all.

And.

And, if you can't know anyone else, then you're always alone.

A snail with a shell that looks like a rock. Armoured and camouflaged.

Often eaten in places as a delicacy.

My therapist took a deep breath. She scratched her nose.

She said, “Some people have high emotional toxicity.”

By “some people” she obviously meant me.

(I also have a degree.)

Toxic emotions.

I don't know if this is a danger or a super power.

I don't know if what's inside me is harsh or beautiful.

I didn't ask her opinion.

But I don't want a ball of yarn or a toxic leak in my chest.

That's not what this is.

I think it's. —

My heart is like a lantern.

## PART I

### Scene One

*Sounds of the subway. The recognizable "Ding-Dang—*

SUBWAY RIDER: Excuse me! Sorry! If I can just squeeze—ow-oo—

*—Dong." (indicates the closing of the doors.) She has squeezed onto the crowded subway car.*

OW. Ugh, Oh, great—

*The subway starts to move, she drops her bag, things scatter. There's a of Sudoku book, pens, etc.*

SR           Crap! Shoot! Sorry, just one of those days, you know? Those stupid days. (*Mutters.*) I swear I'm going to punch someone in the spleen—

GEORGE:   —Excuse me?

SR:           What! Oh, sorry I'm— (*Really seeing him.*) Yeah?

GEORGE:   Is this yours?

*He has picked up a purple highlighter.*

SR:           Yes! Thanks. I— Thank you.

*Awkward beat.*

GEORGE:   I hate the subway in the morning. It's like a circus but all the clowns are assholes, and there aren't any trampolines.

SR:           Yeah... They should get trampolines. At least while you were waiting you could... no, that would be really dangerous.

*Beat.*

GEORGE:   Yeah. I was just joking.

SR:           Yeah.

GEORGE:           Yeah.

*Awkward beat.*

SR:                 Well. Uh... thanks...

GEORGE:           You're welcome. I've seen you here before.

SR:                 On the subway? I'm a regular.

GEORGE:           No, I mean in this car. Second from the end.

SR:                 Because if you crash you're not on the end—

GEORGE:           —and you won't get accordioned like the middle cars.

SR:                 Yeah.

*The subway jolts—they are at the next stop. "Ding." (Sound when the doors open.)*

GEORGE:           This is me.

SR:                 Oh. Well thanks!

GEORGE:           *(As he exits, he calls back.)* Nice jacket!

SR:                 *(Calls over noise.)* Thank you!!

*"Ding-Dang-Dong."*

**Scene Two**

*SUBWAY RIDER is in her room. She holds a tape recorder and presses record. She speaks into it with excitement:*

SR:           Dearest Stranger that I Know,  
  
                  I'm so glad you like my jacket.  
                  When I think of you my heart beats in four directions—not just in a  
                  forward thump, but a thick rattle like a garbage truck, or a dangerous  
                  snake.  
                  With only your eyes, you cause earthquakes inside my chest.  
                  You are Hurricane Juan to the dry fields in my gut.

*Quick shift to the subway car. "Ding." She slips in again before the doors close.  
"Ding-Dang-Dong" GEORGE stands in the same spot.*

SR:           Morning.

GEORGE:    Oh. Hi.

SR:           Hi.

*She looks at him. Stares at him. It's not subtle.*

GEORGE:    Hello.

SR:           Yeah. So...I like your jacket too.

GEORGE:    Oh. It's just black..

SR:           But it's nice...it matches your eyes...the middle part...uh—

GEORGE:    My pupils?

SR:           Yeah...?

*"Ding."*

GEORGE:    This is me.

*“Ding-Dang-Dong.”*

SR: We should continue this conversation—...ugh...

*Shift back to SR’s room.*

Like a palaeontologist discovering rare bones, you unearth things in me I have never known, big and small. Lions and mice who live amidst my entrails. You could turn a library into a zoo with only a glance. A house cat becomes a tiger in response to your wink.

Your voice twists my tangled spaghetti guts around a silver fork, smooth, shiny, and clean. It wakes me up and I absorb it all, every note, moment, and breath, I drown in it: a lonely meatball in a vat of rich tomato sauce. I soak it all in. You hum all my favourite songs.

*Shift as she moves back to the subway.*

*“Ding-Dang Dong.”*

*GEORGE is already there, humming “Single Ladies” by Beyonce.*

*SR awkwardly attempts to sing along but she doesn’t know the song and it doesn’t work musically.*

SR: I love that song. I just always forget the words at this part.

GEORGE: You mean, “Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh?” That part?

SR: Yeah.

*“Ding-Dang-Dong.”*

*Snap back to SR’s room.*

Rattling heart, I am recording this letter because I cannot write straight lines.

If my chest were a birdcage I could unlock, or an oven I could open, I would let you see what you do to my heart; how it transforms into a bird, roasted or blue, depending on the analogy. Tender and sweet. The answer to every Sudoku I do at my desk creates the outline of your face.

*Quick shift to subway.*

SR: Hey, do you ever do Sudoku?

GEORGE: Who?

SR: You know, Sudoku.

GEORGE: I don't know who.

SR: No—I mean—

*“Ding.” As he leaves:*

GEORGE: —I hope you find him. Good luck! Bye!

SR: Not a person! SUDOKU! S U D O K U!!

*“Ding-Dang-Dong.”*

*Snap back.*

SR: Just plant flowers in my gut. My heart jangles like a tambourine, which only becomes music with your heart's solid drum beat added behind it. You back me up better than any hard drive ever could.

And so I think... I think, well... Well, I love you.

More than a pirate loves finding booty on the high seas during a recession. I know it's a little fast, but—these feelings are a lice for which there is no special shampoo. And I think they have nested. My one hope is that you are itchy too. Looking forward to tomorrow at roughly 8:46 am. Approximately two minutes of bliss.

That make me feel a little like I might throw up.

Forget I said that. Forget I said anything.

With Love,

Subway Rider in the Purple Plaid Jacket.

**Scene Three**

*The cling of cutlery hitting plates. GEORGE and MONA sit across the table from one another. They eat symmetrically, mathematically— this is a well-rehearsed routine. Chewing.*

GEORGE: So. How was your week?

MONA: Oh, fine. *(beat)* And you?

GEORGE: Normal. Just fine.

MONA: Consistency is exciting. Consistently.

GEORGE: Normal day at work. Normal week. Normal month. Etcetera.

MONA: I'm so glad. What did you do?

GEORGE: Typing. Lots of key tapping. Scrolling. The odd click, here and there.

MONA: I read an article that too much time on the computer can dull your senses.

GEORGE: Where did you read that?

MONA: On the computer.

*Cutlery on plates. Almost musical, rhythmic.*

GEORGE: Do you have the paper from today?

MONA: I put it aside for you. All last week. In a paper bag. For consistency.

GEORGE: I couldn't find a copy today. There are fewer and fewer. I like it when I can unfold the news. The motion of it. The paper.

MONA: I kept them all for you, just in case. So there's lots to unfold.

GEORGE: Thank you. Later is better for news anyway. Then I already know what happened.

MONA: And that it turned out fine. *(beat)* I bought you a new grey shirt. Online.

GEORGE: You didn't have to—

MONA: I did. It was a great deal. It would've been foolish not to.

GEORGE: I joined a dodgeball team.

MONA: Why? Balls being thrown at your head— Is that necessary?

GEORGE: It's completely necessary. So that you have balls to dodge.  
*(Serious)* That's the name of the game.

MONA: Dodge ball. You're right.

GEORGE: The balls are made of foam.  
I'll meet some people. You could meet people too. Not playing dodgeball.  
A different way.

*Beat.*

GEORGE There's no need to worry. I'll be fine.

*A moment.*

MONA Good. *(beat)* Me too.

*The cutlery ceases.*

*Done.*

## Scene Four

*SR is on the subway. Her heart beat is even louder. Faster too. She might put her hands over it to try and muffle it. She sinks down in her seat, embarrassed. She holds the tape, puts it into an envelope as she speaks.*

SR            *(as if to another passenger)* Sorry. *(They've gone)*

You can hide a blushing problem with make-up, or blame tears on nearby onions or allergies, but a heart ... it rattles so loudly.

Like an ogre in a cage.

Thunder leading up to a lightning strike.

Or the rumble before an explosion.

That might be toxic. And amazing.

Like a firework.

*Takes her hands off her heart. Lets it beat.*

## Scene Five

*MONA is adjusting herself in front of a computer. She sets the scene by lighting a candle and putting it beside her. She looks into a webcam. She puts headphones in.*

*She is dressed nicely on top. She is wearing pyjama pants (if we can see them, or this might be revealed later on.)*

*Takes a deep breath. She clicks to begin.*

*Awkward beat.*

*Awkward smiling. Any other adjustments.*

*Does she have something stuck in her teeth?*

*No. OK. Deep breath. She clicks.*

*A "BELL."*

MONA:        Great. OK. Great. So.

Oh! Can you— oh look, it works just like —ooh.

*Beat.*

This is nice. Or not that nice.

It's convenient. Modern... Um. Sorry, I don't know how to—

Your tie is nice. Yeah, nice tie.

I like how it's...checked.

Geometrically sound.

Colour in consistent quadrants...

*Taps her fingers.*

Sorry, I've never done this before. I just don't know what I'm doing.

Oh, it's not that I'm not tech-savvy— I don't want you to think— I mean, I use the internet a lot. Well not too much. I don't want to give myself carpal tunnel, I mean—

*Stops herself. Speaks quickly— using few breaths:*

I really don't know what to say, I don't even know why I'm here. Oh gosh, sorry, what a horrible thing to say to—no, I just mean...this isn't something I usually do, that I would do on my own volition.

Oh, not that it's an odd thing to do on your own voli—, it's just not something I would do usually, it's just not my type of thing—not that it's a type of thing, like a bad or funny type of thing — I don't want you to think I'm generalizing, but if there is a generally perceived type of individual who does this kind of...thing to meet people, which is so completely legitimate because it is so incredibly difficult to meet people, I don't really meet anyone ever, but now I'm meeting you, and it's so nice to meet you, you seem really just very nice so far. I'm so—

*Sound: "BEEP."*

Oh. I guess that means our time is up. So...what happens next?

Do we exchange information or...uh do I— would you like to accompany me on a regularly timed date? In real life?

*Beat. It's not good news.*

Oh.

*Lights out on MONA.*

## **Scene 5.5**

*On the subway: It is on the way home, and GEORGE is seated, absorbed in reading the paper. SR slips a cassette tape into his bag. He doesn't notice. She feels like a successful spy.*

*Sound: "Ding."—doors open and SR stealthily departs.*

### Scene Six

*MONA is still at her computer, between dates. She picks up her phone. Speed dials. Nothing. She leaves a message:*

MONA: Hi. It's me. Just checking in to see how the... typing and clicking is going this week. And to make sure you're getting enough protein. I googled it and you should be getting 50 grams a day, based on your size and activity level. Probably more, now that you're playing dodgeball. Call me. We'll figure it out. I'll email you. Bye.

### Scene Seven

*Frustrated, SUBWAY RIDIER hits record on the tape player and begins.*

SR: Dearest Stranger That I Know,  
  
With every syllable you speak, the lyrics of your linguistics loop around my heart like laces, and you drag it behind you wherever you go. And I am forced to lead my daily life with an embarrassing clump yanked out of my chest.  
And while you work, tip-tap-typing away at whatever you do, my heart rubs at your ankles like a stray cat. Your eyes stay glued to your screen, blind to its spurting temper tantrums at your feet.  
My heart leaves bloodstains on your polyester socks.

*Switch to subway.*

*"Ding-Dang-Dong."*

*SR stares at GEORGE. Pointedly.*

GEORGE: So—

SR: —Can I ask you a personal question?

GEORGE: Um—

SR: —Why do we never talk on the subway ride home?

GEORGE: I never see you on the way home. Anyway, that's when I—

SR: —read the paper.

GEORGE: Yeah.

SR: That's why you never see me. We often overlap. Sometimes for longer than one stop.

GEORGE: It's very long and verbose.

SR: I like that you read the paper, I just wish you'd do it on your own time.

GEORGE: I thought this was my own/ time—

SR: — Don't you ever get bored? It's just so black and white.

GEORGE: It's a whole world in itself.

SR: Yeah, this world. It's about this world.

GEORGE: Yes.

*"DING"*

SR: You're missing this world because you're busy reading about it.

GEORGE: No, I'm missing work. I'm missing my—

*"Ding-Dang-Dong."*

—stop!

*Shift back.*

SR: You know, on the way home the news is basically the past.  
History.  
Irrelevant, basically.

And I usually like older things. They have substance. You can hold a tape. You can wind your words forward and back, clasp them tight in your hands.

SR: Control cadence and tones, some sentences powerfully pronounced, their peaks like mountains, creating a map to that moment that leads back to how you felt. Emails are flat like deserts, dry with no dimension. I'd rather have things with weight that won't get lost in the clouds. So in the right context, I really like a newspaper. But not in the context where it's between us.

And when you leave every day, I want to follow you like my grandmother follows *The Young and the Restless*. But I restrain myself. And the hours pass as slowly as kidney stones. And maybe it's a question of pheromones... But the thing is...you've changed my life.

Everyday my day is a little different because of you and the second to last car on the approximately 8:46am train.

And I am trying not to be impatient, but I slipped that cassette tape into your jacket pocket one week ago. And one day.

And I'm still waiting for something to happen. Make something happen. Please.

With Love,  
Subway Rider in the Purple Plaid Jacket.

*Lights on SR dim. She presses stop and takes out the tape.*

*She puts it in an envelope, seals it, and exits.*

## Scene Eight

*MONA is at her computer again. She holds a glass of wine and works at looking calm. The "BELL". She's ready.*

MONA: Hi there. So tell me about yourself.

*Beat.*

No, you talk first.

*Beat.*

Really. Please.

*Beat.*

What brings me here? I live here— OH. Like *here...*

*Beat.*

My computer told me to. And I listened. Oh, I don't want you to think I'm delusional, it's nothing like that. Have you heard of GoogleShrink? It's online therapy. You record your thoughts and feelings and email them to Google. Google takes into account your ideas, emotions, vocal tone, patterns, cadence, the time of year—everything—amalgamates them into appropriate therapeutic advice, and sends it to you in an email. It's very efficient.

*BEEP!*

Well. That wasn't so bad. Should we exchange email addresses?

*Beat. Not the response she wanted.*

Oh.

*Lights out on MONA.*

## Scene Nine

*On the subway.*

*GEORGE is seated, reading the paper.*

*SR: sits near the back, hidden behind a large book.*

*She tries to look covert. She takes out a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses and puts them on.*

*She speaks in GEORGE's direction, though she knows he is not listening.*

SR: I have taken to wearing sunglasses most days, because staring is rude and mystery is intriguing.  
I am trying to send you a message.  
Subliminally.

*Beat. She gets up. Romantic music swells.*

*She speaks to GEORGE; moves towards him. He doesn't notice.*

SR: It's just...our lives run together perfectly while in transit. Neither of us trip when the subway starts and stops, shifting weight from leg to leg in time together, like we are waltzing.

*They perform a subway waltz as she continues:*

SR: We dance almost every week, in rush hour home on Fridays, when there are no seats. I used to hate Fridays because it meant not seeing you for two days. Now, it's our musical number.  
The grand finale of our week.  
And you don't even know.

*During the next section GEORGE slips a tape into SR's pocket unnoticed.*

SR: So I just need to know if...just listen to my tapes.  
And get back to me asap or I'll burn every newspaper in the city.

*"Ding."*

*The reverey ends and SR yells:*

SR: Did you hear that? I'll burn every paper!

*GEORGE looks at her. He grabs his things and exits.*

SR: Hey! This isn't even your stop!

*"Ding-Dang-Dong."*

SR: Have a nice walk, Mr. Boring Jacket, Mr. Emotionally-Unavailable!  
You...suck!

*SR discovers that there is now a tape in her pocket. She pulls it out. It's from him.*

SR: I suck!

## Scene Ten

*MONA at her computer. Her glass of wine is emptier.  
Headphones still in, she is mid conversation.*

MONA: Oh gosh. How is that even relevant? I mean...it's just irritating to consider, if you ask me.

*Beat.*

Sometimes I feel like a magnet with no polarity at all. A magnet in the north North Pole, frozen, attracted to nothing.

*Beat.*

Oh, I don't mean you. It was a metaphor—well, a simile.  
About me—but not related to my life at all.  
Not that I'm saying I'm—

*She takes a deep breath.*

So, really, um, I guess..

Well, what I'm trying to say is that I feel like...

I feel like the chicken scratch question mark at the end of the sentence that explains the world.

*Relief.*

How are you?

*Beat. BEEP!*

*Lights out on MONA.*

## Scene Eleven

*SR's room. She has her tape recorder. She records:*

SR:           Dearest Stranger I Thought I knew,  
               Sorry I raised my voice out of pure primal passion today. How did you put  
               this into my purple plaid pocket? I'm going to listen to it right now.  
               Here we go.

*She puts the tape in the tape recorder. She almost presses play, but stops herself.*

OK.  
 5...4...3...2...  
 5..3...2....

*She presses play.*

*We hear GEORGE saying the word "I".*

OK...

*There is silence.*

*She presses her ear up.*

*She fast-forwards through, listening for vocal sounds. "Click."*

*Anxiously, she flips the tape to the other side and presses play.*

*We hear GEORGE's voice saying the word "Can't".*

*She continues to listen for more.....*

*Fast forwards the tape. Checks again. Nothing.*

*"Click." She's reached the end of the tape.*

SR:           That's all there is.

**Scene Twelve**

*MONA has had a bit more wine. One headphone has fallen out, but she doesn't seem to notice.*

MONA: Love? Pfff. You know. Pfffff.  
You certainly don't waste any time.

*Beat.*

Right, I guess that is the point. Hmm.  
Well, I suppose I was in love once, maybe, but it was so long ago. Who knows anymore. Sometimes I forget what was real and what was virtual—I mean, my shrink lives in my computer. And I think I trust her more as a result. Isn't that funny? Because she is... completely regulated.  
What about you? Have you ever been in love?

*Beat.*

You know, I think what they say is true: hindsight really is twenty-twenty. The sort of twenty-twenty that makes you want to poke your own eyes out and stuff your sockets with cold, hard golf balls.  
But I've learned my lesson with matters like that.

*BEEP!*

Do you want my number?

*Beat. No response. With more confidence than she's used to, like trying something on-*

MONA: Your loss!

*Quickly deflated. It didn't work.  
Lights out on MONA.*

### Scene Thirteen

*Shift back to SR's room.*

*She is recording:*

SR:           So I've listened to the whole thing over...  
                  It's just those two words: I. Can't.

My hopes have fallen like a tower of Jenga blocks piled so high that they were a liability for airplanes crossing the sky. And the rumble from the crash has caused an earthquake that rates a 7 on my internal Richter scale, and the result is a hairline crack through my right atrium.

Splitting it from the left.

Two atriums. Split.

*Beat.*

And my sockets have become sporadic sprinklers, spurting stupidly for only you. And I go on for far too long, professing feelings through detailed metaphors and you...you said...two lousy words— one syllable for each half of my heart.

I. Can't.

I. Can't.

*Beat. Hold on.*

Unless I listened to the sides of the tape in the wrong order. And you meant to say... Can't I...?? Can't you what?

Please let me know what you meant to say.

A. S. A. P. Asap.

Love,

Subway Rider in the Purple Plaid Jacket

## Scene Fourteen

*MONA waits at the table. She picks up the phone, uses speed dial. It rings. It rings. No answer. She hangs up, dejected.*

*She opens her computer. The “GoogleShrink Intro” plays (a calming sound, like Orca whales). The webcam is off.*

*She clicks and begins:*

MONA:       Session 4.  
                   GoogleShrink. This isn’t working out.  
                   Everything has seemed to decline in my life since I started these sessions.  
                   It feels funny recording a goodbye message to...well...a computer  
                   program...but I feel that I owe you something.  
                   And I actually don’t owe you anything, because the free trial lasts eight  
                   sessions.  
                   And because you’re not a real person. Which I respect.

                  Anyway, I tried, but the web speed dating event you found to get me  
                   “out of my shell” and, well, I’m just not good at it. I like my shell, I think.  
                   It’s hard to get out from under a shell for a face on a screen.  
                   No matter how intriguing their tie may be.

                  Besides, I can’t do this right now. I need to—  
                   Something’s wrong with my son. He’s never missed dinner on a Sunday,  
                   it’s just assumed and..  
                   And he isn’t returning my calls. Or emails or texts. Even if he’s busy, how  
                   long does it take to send a simple emoji of an affirmative thumb?  
                   Something is going on.  
                   So all the best...and goodbye.  
                   Send.

*She clicks, and breathes a sigh of relief.  
 Lights out on MONA.*

## Scene Fifteen

*On the subway: SUBWAY RIDER looks for GEORGE, but he's not there. A stop.*

*"Ding."*

*She exits.*

*"Ding-Dang-Dong."*

## Scene Sixteen

*SR is recording.*

SR: Dear Stranger who Quite Possibly Can't,

It's been a week since I've seen you.

Do you ever feel an ache?

Like you're a ball in a game of *Hungry Hungry Hippos*, but you're stuck.

I'm stuck. I am oddly shaped so I won't roll, and there's no hippo to eat me up.

You know?

And I know—I know it's a long shot, but I still think...well...I need to know for sure. If you are that hippo. So I am going to do something drastic. Something meet-me-at-the-top-of-the-empire-state-building-climb-your-fire-escape-with-a-thorny-rose-in-my-mouth-sketch-you-naked-on-a-sinking-ship drastic.

I'm sending this tape along with my heart.

I don't know how to get them to you now, so I'll leave the package on the platform at your stop, and when my heart recognizes your polyester socks she will follow you home.

Just to see if.

After this, I promise to leave you alone.

Please be gentle with her. Don't lose her.

Even if you decide you don't need her, I do.

With Love and a Major Organ,

A.

*Sound of a heartbeat. She might turn her back to us. Either way, a gasp. The heartbeat is louder. Her heart falls into a large manilla envelope.*

## Scene Seventeen

*SR puts the large manilla envelope on the subway platform and exits.*

*GEORGE enters. He feels it following him. He sees it, picks it up and exits, the sound of the heartbeat fading as he goes.*

## Scene Eighteen

*MONA is on the phone.*

MONA: Hello, officer? I'm calling to report a missing child.  
My son.

*Beat.*

A week and sixteen and a half hours.  
He has dark hair. \*  
Brown eyes. \*  
31 years old.\*

*Beat.*

Yes. That's right. 31.\*

*(\*Or substitute appropriate age and features.)*

*Beat.*

No, no signs of violence or...well, it depends what you mean by foul play. He hasn't returned any of my calls. That's foul manners, if you ask me. He's not home, or he won't answer the door. All the lights are on— that's irresponsible either way—

*Beat.*

Don't tell me to "cut the cord" you little cretin. Who do you think you are?

*Beat.*

Oh yes, I understand.

*Beat.*

I understand that as usual, I need to do everything myself. Thanks.

*She hangs up. She takes a deep breath. She turns on her computer.*

## Scene Nineteen

*SR has her tape recorder. She records:*

SR: Dear Stranger Who Has My Heart,  
Where are you?  
I haven't seen you or my heart for five days.  
I don't even know what to do with this tape.

So I am Googling your subway stop, searching Instagram for your eyes above a newspaper, and flooding Craigslist with requests for bloodstained polyester socks. I am swiping Tinder left then left then left until I see your face. I am texting, What'sApp-ing, and Facebook messaging with anyone who might be related to you.  
I have planted tiny GoPros in the top ten trampoline parks, to keep watch just in case. You decide to test it out.

I am Yelping your favourite places and tweeting about the tone of your voice. I am Skyping with strangers with suggestive screen names.  
I am discussing my sketches of you on Reddit and scouring E-bay for anything you would bid on or sell.  
I am Pinteresting photos of black jackets I think you'd like.  
I'm DubSmash-ing your favourite Beyoncé song and starting a Kickstarter campaign to raise reward money as an incentive for anyone who turns you in. To me. And I'm blogging about all of it.  
I am creating an App that recognizes your walk.  
And stops it in its tracks. I. Will. Find. You.

And retrieve my heart.

*She travels into the audience, and hands out hand-drawn MISSING HEART posters, swiftly asking people if they have seen her heart. The Peter Gunn /Pink Panther/Mission Impossible Theme (something with that feel) plays.*

## Scene Twenty

*MONA is on the phone, in front of her computer.*

MONA:       *(into phone)* Where are you? I have the last eight papers set aside for you.  
                  To unfold. Bye.

*Hangs up. Back to her computer — GoogleShrink intro and then:*

MONA:       Session 5. Dear Google Shrink,  
                  I got your email. As usual, you're right.  
                  I'm back because I do need someone—thing to talk to. I need advice.  
                  My son is gone and the police just want me to back off, but because of the  
                  attachment issues you've already identified in me, I can't do that.  
                  And I know he's grown up, but...  
                  He's the person I talk to; he's my person. You only need one.  
                  But you do need one.  
                  And maybe I haven't given him enough...girth.  
                  I've never accepted his vegetarianism or his love of dodgeball—  
                  both are dangerous—but he...well...I don't know what to do. I can't  
                  just... -what should I do? I need something to do. I already took a nap.  
                  Let me know.  
                  Send. *(She clicks.)*

*MONA closes her computer.*

*She holds it to her chest.*

*She exits.*

**Scene Twenty-One**

*SR enters with a plastic water bottle. It contains a crumpled paper heart. She is dragging her leg as if it is asleep. She holds the tape recorder and presses record.*

SR:           Hey Stranger,  
                  Did you leave a message in a bottle for me, floating in a puddle of grime  
                  at my subway stop?  
                  It smells like Eau de Sweaty Ninja Turtle.  
                  And the message—it's just two words. Again.  
                  Thirty-Four Montrose.  
                  So I've Google-mapped it and marked out a path.  
                  Thirty-Four Montrose.  
                  I hope when I get there I'll find my heart.  
                  I just wish my leg would wake up.  
                  Over and out.

*She takes the tape out and leaves it on the stage.*

***End of Part One.***

*No intermission.*

## The In-Between

GEORGE: I've been feeling strange.  
 For example...in the morning I wake up fully awake.  
 All parts at once, on like a switch, and it's not a choice.  
 Waking my whole self up.  
 And then there's the matter of the heart.  
 I went to a doctor.  
 I told him, "I think there is something wrong here."  
 He attached me to some machines. There was a chorus of beeps, and symphony of hmmms... and a wrinkled brow in five even lines, that looked like a bar of music. He said that nothing came up in the electrocardiogram.  
 I told him, "I don't know what that means."  
 He said, "There's nothing."  
 I said, "I know... But then why do I feel..." ??

*He is unable to come up with the word.*

He referred me to a therapist.  
 Who asked me about my mother.  
 I said, "She's fine."  
 She said, "Tell me more. Most issues are somewhat hereditary."  
 And I could.  
 Words just dropped from my mouth as if they were baby teeth finally falling out.  
 My mother.

Well...  
 There once was a woman with grey dryer fluff in her gut.  
 Interwoven with her intestines. Matted around her colon. Floating amidst the bones of her lungs in small clumps, like after you clean a lint trap for the first time in a while.

No doctor picked up on this condition, but it was how she felt.  
 And she knew herself better than any form of science.

Then my therapist said, "Mmm-Hmm..,"  
 in a way that made me think she knew something I didn't.  
 So I thought. Hard.  
 Stories and sentences suddenly coming together like puzzle pieces.

GEORGE: My mother.

She 'd speak rarely and softly, for fear of spitting dust. She used as few syllables as possible, and avoided the letter "p" as a precaution. She coughed in grey clouds.

And I know that some days she could feel the grey fluff boil and bubble, into a thick tar that she worried would overflow. She always leaned flat against walls, never put on ice skates, never reached for anything on a shelf that was too high. She held banisters so tight her knuckles went cadaver white.

We never travelled, to avoid any turbulence.  
Parts of our place were plastic-wrapped.

And she stayed a statue, an ice sculpture the sun couldn't melt. Her limbs were often asleep. They took long afternoon naps. And so did she.

Silence became her art.

She strung pauses together carefully like glass beads until her neck became heavy, her throat constricted. Her heart buried under layers and layers of cold, hard, glass.

A time capsule that pumped blood.

It would take immense strength and will to excavate it.

To even recognize it. If she could find it.

You can't Googlemap your insides.

My therapist squinted her eyes.

And I thought about swallowing a compass.

Then she said, "You didn't have a normal childhood."

And I said, "Mmmm-hmmm,"

As if I had known all along.

*A light — or something with a little magic — leads him to discover the tape SR has left.  
He exits with it.*

PART II  
**Scene One**

*MONA is at her computer. She has headphones in.  
 A BELL.*

MONA:               Hi there.

*Beat.*

MONA:               My day so far.... well, I got up, called the police again, took a nap, messaged my internet therapist, swept all the floors, put a roast in the oven because I wanted to kill something and thought it would be healthiest to go with something high in protein and already dead. And then I logged on here in search of eternally binding love. Just for something to do. You?

*Beat.*

*(too loudly)* Hello? Can you hear me? *(beat)* Hello? Am I even here?

*"BEEP"*

Good to know.

*She sighs. She turns off her screen. Puts her head on her desk. From offstage:*

SR:                   Anyone here?

MONA:               Apparently! *(regrets this)* I mean...

*Doorbell. SUBWAY RIDER, paper heart in hand.*

MONA:               Hello—

SR:                   — 34 Montrose?

MONA:               How did you get that paper heart?

SR:                   It was left for me. He left it I think—I thought he might be here? He's about this tall and rides around town on the subway wearing a black jacket.

MONA: I don't know where he is. How do you know him?

SR: Intimately.

MONA: Oh. How?

SR: We're travel companions. On the subway.

MONA: You know each other from the subway.

SR: Yeah, so what? How do you know him then?

MONA: He's my son.

SR: Oh. (*Beat/Gulp*) In that case, I feel I should inform you that... I love him.

*Beat.*

I'm sorry if you don't like it, it's not by choice. It's science mixed with fate and pheromones...and...and I'm ready to stop.

MONA: So stop then.

SR: I can't yet. He has my heart.

MONA: Your heart? How well do you actually know my son?

SR: I consider him an important person in my life.

MONA: And what does he consider you?

SR: Well, I don't know. He's not really a big share-er. Where does he live?

MONA: He's not there.

SR: Tell me something, anything. Please. Let's start at the beginning. How was he conceived?

MONA: What? No.

SR: Fine. What's his name?

MONA: You don't know his—

SR: — His legal name. For research purposes.

MONA: George George.

*SR scribbles this down.*

SR: How long has it been since you've heard from... George?

MONA: ... George.  
Almost nine days. But today I found this tape on the step.  
I haven't had a tape player in years, I don't know what he was thinking.

SR: I have one.

MONA: On you? —

*SR has already pulled it out.*

SR: You can use it, but only if you tell me a bit about him. And let me stay here, just for a few nights. In case he comes back, or my heart shows up in the mail.

MONA: You can't stay here.

SR: Please, I— I don't think I remember where I live.  
You won't even know I'm here, I'll sleep on your couch.

MONA: And I can listen to the tape right now?

SR: Yes.

MONA: In private?

SR: Fine. *(She gives MONA the tape recorder.)* Tell me when you're done.

*SR exits dragging her leg, which is still asleep.*

*MONA puts the tape into the recorder and listens.*

**Scene Two**

*GEORGE speaks into a tape recorder.*

GEORGE: Mother,  
I'm sending you this to let you know I'm alive. Hi. I'm alive.  
Or I was when I recorded this.  
I probably still am. Hopefully.

And...well, you may have heard, but I am on the run. I stole a heart.  
I didn't mean to, but it wouldn't leave me alone. And I became fascinated  
by it...  
I mean, what an opportunity.

How often do other people give you their hearts?

But having a heart like this one is very messy.  
It has ruined five pairs of my socks with its spurting tantrums.  
Yet every morning it has begun to snuggle into the sleeve of my shirt.  
And I get up to go to work, but I never actually end up there.  
I go so many other places. I know it's not practical but...I don't care.

It's rightful owner may end up at your house.  
I gave her your address because I was worried she wouldn't be able to  
find her way home, without her heart—you know the saying.  
And if she shows up, ask her questions and listen to what she says.  
I think it would be a good thing.  
For you. For me.  
Because  
I keep thinking about that story about the paper heart—the one you used  
to tell me when I was little. Why did you tell me that?  
I think it's best if I don't talk to you for a while.

Sincerely, George.

PS. Please respect my vegetarianism in the future. I get plenty of protein  
without eating harmless cows. Have you ever heard of chick peas?  
And dodgeball is a good outlet for me.

*GEORGE disappears.*

**Scene Three**

*The tape ends. SR pokes her head in, then enters.*

SR: So?

MONA: Do you eat meat?

SR: Yes. Can I put my head to your chest?

MONA: No.

SR: OK. So, the tape...

MONA: It's private.

SR: Was it longer than two words?

MONA: Yes.

SR: Then there must be something in it— please? I don't know what else I can do—I've Pinterested 176 stylish black jackets, I gave out 436 MISSING HEART posters and now my arm is asleep too. I'm going to have to start a Vlog.

MONA: A blog.

SR: A Vlog.

MONA: Are your lips asleep too? You're slurring your words.

SR: And you're doing nothing. He's your son. Maybe your heart is missing too!

*She might be onto something.*

SR: Wait, is it?

*The mail arrives: a letter slides onstage.*

MONA: It's the mail.

*MONA retrieves it.*

MONA: It's not from him.

*SR looks at the envelope:*

SR: *(reads)* Google Shrink?

MONA: If you don't respond by email in a moment of personal "crisis", they send you regular mail— to check in and make sure you haven't offed yourself I guess. I suppose it's to avoid lawsuits.

SR: What is Google Shrink?

MONA: Exactly what it sounds like.

SR: Ok. That is...totally weird—

MONA: — It's a lot less weird than leaving cassette tapes- who has cassette tapes these days?

*MONA opens the letter.*

SR: I think they're old-timey and romantic. Vintage.  
Like reading the newspaper.  
So what is your robot therapist telling you to do?

MONA: Go out. Meet people. It's silly.

SR: What did she— it say?

MONA: Nothing. It's just a flyer. It's for a speed dating event. She— it— wants me to "take it to the next level."

SR: How?

MONA: This one is in person. Usually they're on the computer.  
*(reading flyer)* And there's a wine tasting, with optional glow-in-the-dark bowling after. No.

- SR: You should go.
- MONA: I couldn't. There's only one thing I hate more than bowling, and it's the dark. GoogleShrink only sent this because I checked "Moderately" under "Enjoys Leisure Sports..." in my patient profile generator. And I don't—I only checked it to seem interesting.
- SR: So? Don't you trust Google?
- MONA: Of course, it's not about that. I'm just... not a people person.
- SR: You would be if you met the right person. Why not at least try to fall in love? Or like. Or anything.
- MONA: Falling doesn't sound very appealing to me.
- SR: You can borrow my jacket. Men seem to love it.
- MONA: No thank you.  
I'm just better on a computer than in real life. IRL.
- SR: If you want to connect with a *person*, you should go sit in front of a person.
- MONA: Sure. But I like my computer.  
It's older, so it stays warm longer after it's turned off. It's firm and the fan shakes, which you can feel when you carry it hugged close to your chest. It's...comforting. Solid. Password protected.  
It opens and closes just when I choose. It only connects when I ask it to.
- SR: That's really dark. Like a horror movie, but boring.
- MONA: ...you really think I should go?
- SR: Yes.
- MONA: Alright. But I'm not glow bowling.
- SR: Your loss!

*MONA has left. Alone, SR opens her computer. She starts her Vlog.*

SR:           Entry One:

George,

I have gotten a lot of emails since I handed out the posters— I had no idea there were so many other lost hearts around town, in bicycle baskets and laundered pockets; acting as the insoles of shoes.

Don't get mine mixed up.

My heart likes long massages and *The Golden Girls*. Just give her back. I feel so empty. Even after eating six ham sandwiches and a box of Lucky Charms.

From,

A Heartless Subway Rider

PS. Your mother is worried. I think. She's sort of hard to read.

*Beat. A forced shift in demeanour:*

Oh, and if anyone else is watching this...welcome to my Vlog.  
I hope you like it. Cool.

*She closes her computer.*

## Scene Four

*MONA is sitting at a table. She's nervous. A BELL.*

MONA: OK. Hi. Nice socks. So...

*Beat. She's nervous and speaks quickly:*

No, I've never been here. But given the precise directions and street view Google provided for me, and the motivational quotes after every turn, to make sure I'd actually show up, it was easy to find. I mean... I'm not very good at this. If we're being honest, which we might as well, because look where we are. Not that I'm saying this is a bad place to be...it's just not where I imagined I'd be if you'd asked— not that you did. OK.

*Beat.*

Oh. Favourite book? *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. You?

*Beat.*

No it's not! Wow, what a coincidence. How funny...

*Beat.*

MONA: A weird fact? Really?

*Beat.*

Well...why not.

Uh... Well, my whole body fell asleep during a nap twenty years ago. I'm still waiting for it to wake up. I'm starting to get pins and needles in the very tip of my nose sometimes, but that's all.

That's why I didn't notice until now.

That you'd been holding my hand.

*MONA is still. Beat. The buzzer goes off.*

MONA: So...I'll glow bowl if you do.

*She smiles.*

*Lights out on MONA.*

## Scene Five

*At Mona's, the mail arrives. An envelope slides onstage addressed to SUBWAY RIDER/A.*

SR: Oh.

*She rips it open. It's a tape.*

*SR finds her tape recorder, puts it in.*

SR: There better be more than two words on this thing.

*She presses play.*

GEORGE: Hi. Uh...it's me.

You know, the guy from the subway...who..uh...has your heart. I just saw your Vlog. I've seen your posters too. You're a really good artist.

*Beat.*

GEORGE: Uh, so...I was planning on returning your heart the entire time, I swear... but then one day, I just shoved it into my chest. It cried for days and so did I—culture shock of a new place, and all— but now we are starting to get used to one another. And we may run away together. That thought makes me feel so guilty, which makes me want to run even more.

There are downsides too. Your heart embarrasses me—I just bought the DVD box set of *The Golden Girls* and for some reason Dorothy keeps making me tear-up. I keep eating Cookie Dough ice cream even though I'm lactose intolerant.

I guess these are things you love, but I don't know if I love them. But, right now, I love them through your heart. My own seems to be a placeholder in my chest.

But yours is...well, the world is brighter. And darker too.

Like 3-D glasses, but better.

Like 5-D glasses. I'm seeing in 5-D.

I have been looking for purple plaid, because now I want it too. Maybe I'll get a scarf or a hat. I would ask to borrow your jacket, but I doubt you will ever lend me anything ever again.

I hope you will be able to find it in your heart to forgive me.  
Oh—shoot.

Pretend I didn't say that. Pretend I didn't say anything. Ok. Well.  
Hang in there. I might be falling in love with you.  
I don't know.

L—Bye,  
Subway Rider in Black.

*Upset, SR takes the tape out and pulls it apart, yanking the shiny ribbon out of the cassette. Lights down.*

### **Scene Six**

*The next morning. SR has still not moved. The tape ribbon she pulled out is all over her lap.*

MONA: Maybe it's time to move on. All this moping isn't doing you any good. Maybe there is a bright side here.

SR: What?

MONA: Things turn out the best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.

SR: What does that..?—

MONA: —The journey of a million feet starts with a single toe.

SR: That's not even how...

MONA: *(trying again)* e.e. cummings once said that the world laughs in flowers.

*SR gives MONA a hard look, then begins to rip the tape ribbon into small pieces.*

MONA: Did you rip up the contents of the recycling bin?

SR: Yup. And I blasted angry music and nodded my head aggressively for an hour. I might get a guinea pig just to laugh at it. And it's all your fault.

MONA: How is it my fault—?

SR: —*You* gave birth to him. And then he shattered me, like I was a stupid piñata at some grimy faced kid's birthday, and took off with all the good things I had inside me, leaving me split and alone in the dirt.

MONA: I'm sorry you feel that way.

SR: I don't—I don't feel any way, I don't have a heart, remember? I'm just spouting out leftover words like sour milk now.

MONA: Oh.

SR: What am I going to do if I never get my heart back?

MONA: Anything you want.

SR: But I don't want anything.

MONA: Some people would consider that a great thing. To have everything you want.

*Beat.*

SR: Can you go away?

*MONA does.*

**Scene Seven**

*SR opens her computer. Her tone has greyed.*

SR: Here we go, entry two.

George. I am mourning something that you don't even notice has died.

Listen, just don't ruin my heart.

Don't use it as a stress ball or a paperweight, or fry it up and eat it with potatoes. Just be good to it because I, well...I. -

I am starting to forget its practical use. My limbs are learning to function while asleep.

But I have an ache, like a toothache, but coming from *(Puts her hand where her heart would be.)*

I think I could get used to it too though, before long.

But I do, I want my heart back.

You know where I live now.

Because it's with your mother. So yeah.

And to anyone else watching this Vlog...look, just stay away from men in black jackets who ride the subway and like the newspaper just a little bit too much.

## Scene Eight

*MONA sits at a table. Something is a little different than before—there is no timer, it's a regular date. She is nervous.*

MONA: I like your tie, it's very...patriotic.

*Beat.*

I'm happy you called. I'm glad to see you. Sorry if I'm talking fast, this is the first non-timed da— meeting of acquaintances I've been on in over a decade. I mean...-

*Stops herself. Beat.*

I hope this isn't too forward, but I think my hands have woken up...

*She offers her hands.*

*Lights out on MONA.*

## Scene Nine

*GEORGE emerges, in another space, and speaks into his tape recorder.*

GEORGE: Mother,

I am checking in. Probably still alive. Check.

I started looking up emotions in the dictionary, but so far it hasn't helped me understand them.

*He reads from dictionary:*

Joy: A feeling of great pleasure or happiness. OK... (*Flips, then reads:*)

Happiness: The state of being happy. Tom's heart swelled with happiness.

OK... (*Scans down the page.*) Happy: Feeling or showing pleasure or contentment. Fine. (*Flips.*)

Pleasure: a feeling of happy satisfaction or enjoyment. This car makes driving in the city a pleasure.

I don't think it's possible to talk adequately about feelings using words.

Maybe that's why we never did.

I don't know what I am right now, but just that I am.

I hope you are too.

George.

**Scene Ten**

*It is morning. There's a new lightness to MONA.*

MONA: How are we doing this morning?

SR: Fine.

MONA: Great. Listen, maybe you should look for a new job? Start looking for a place?

SR: Sure. I'll write it in my day planner. Right below: "Finally give up on ever being happy."

MONA: You said you were fine.

SR: I am. I'm fine.

MONA: OK. *(Beat.)* Then, could you keep your night weeping down? The neighbours complained again.

SR: It shouldn't be a problem. My sockets have dried up.

*MONA leaves. A tape arrives. SR looks at it. Pulls herself up and follows MONA off—*

SR: Another tape came for you.

*MONA rushes back in with the tape, gets the tape recorder, and presses play...  
(She listens to the tape alone— )*

## Scene Eleven

*Somewhere else, GEORGE speaks into his tape recorder.*

GEORGE: Mother,  
 Yesterday, I power-walked to the subway, past a man sleeping on the sidewalk, and then could not stop weeping all day. Four people on the street told me to see a therapist.  
 I went to see a romantic comedy instead.  
 It was much more enjoyable.

*Beat.*

I think I'm beginning to realize how much you may have messed me up.

Lo—From,  
 George.

## Scene Twelve

*A table in a nice restaurant. MONA enters and sits.*

MONA: Sorry I'm late. Something came up. How are you?

*Beat.*

Good.

*Beat.*

You know...I'm just, well, you can dedicate your whole life to something and still do it wrong, did you know that?  
 How is that even possible?  
 It's like a cruel hoax, the world is full of boobytraps and I am trying not to trip but...nice tie, by the way. Really...abstract.

*Beat.*

MONA: I... I don't think I can...this isn't working.  
 That's a terrible tie. I'm sorry. It is.

*MONA struggles to say something. She brings her hands to her lap.*

MONA: I—I think we should stop seeing each other.  
*Lights out on MONA.*

**Scene Thirteen**

*MONA and SR at the dinner table. An emptiness, like a grey fog. Cutlery sounds are sad and echoing. They eat in time together, as Mona did with George, but the feeling is much heavier.*

SR: I got a job.

MONA: Good. Good job.

SR: I went there yesterday and today.

MONA: That's why it's been so quiet...

SR: I think I'll go tomorrow.

*Beat.*

MONA: Don't you need your jacket?

SR: I don't want to wear it anymore, since I'm taking the subway again.  
Bad memories.

MONA: Oh. *(Beat.)* You never told me your name.

SR: Any tapes lately?

MONA: No. You?

SR: No. Ah well.

MONA: Ah well.

## Scene Fourteen

*SR turns to her computer. She presses Record on her V-log. On the other side of the stage, MONA is on the phone. She leaves a message. MONA and SR aren't listening to one another, but leaving their own separate recordings, which may overlap as they speak.*

SR:           Entry 3. George. Stranger.

*Beat.*

SR:           I don't have anything to say.

MONA:       George. Hello—

SR:           —You're a stranger—

MONA:       —It's your mother.

SR:           I guess we can talk about me. I go to work. It's...—

MONA:       —It's important that you leave this all behind you, and we get back to the way things were. I'll forgive you. I already have.

SR:           It's fine.

MONA:       —I hope you'll forgive me.  
For giving you meat. I understand now that your vegetarianism is real, and that dodge ball is a real sport that deserves respect. I wanted to protect you. And I did, for so long. Don't forget that. I—  
*(Beat.)* Bye. *(She hangs up.)*

SR:           Except, sometimes, on the subway home, there are echoes in the cavity inside my chest, rumbling and screeching. Something, somewhere in the dark, is crying out in pain. I think it might be me.

I should get a bike.

*The mail arrives— a tape slides on stage. SR picks it up. She puts it in the tape recorder and presses play.*

*GEORGE appears, and speaks into his tape recorder as she listens:*

GEORGE: Dearest Stranger that I know,  
Please accept my apologies for my act of theft.  
I am out of sorts to say the least.

I go back and forth between your emotions like a metronome on a piano.  
But I do know that I hate *The Golden Girls*, especially Dorothy! She's so  
dominant.  
I have to find out what I love.

So I took Janine out—that's your heart, I named your heart Janine, I hope  
that's alright—I took Janine out. I left her in the freezer, just for the day,  
and I left her my iPhone and a magazine to keep her entertained. And I  
went out alone. And I saw a puppy and it licked my face and I enjoyed the  
sensation. Of dog saliva being passed across my cheek!  
I think I might love dogs.  
But then I saw a man yelling at his child and had to breathe deeply to  
keep my head from exploding. I think I might have issues with fathers.

I am learning so much, but it is very overwhelming.  
Don't worry: tonight I will stay in and watch *The Golden Girls* with Janine.  
I am keeping her safe.  
I'm not sure if I love you, but I have come to care deeply for your heart.  
Sincerely,

George.

*The tape stops. SR removes it.*

*"Doorbell"*

*MONA exits and returns carrying a cooler. (We may have seen GEORGE with this cooler  
throughout). She holds it out to SR.*

MONA: It's just this.

*SR looks at the cooler. She might place her hand on it for a moment.*

SR: Janine.

MONA: Who?

*MONA might take a peek. Either way, she understands...*

MONA: This is what you've been waiting for! Open her up—or whatever you do.

SR: No. I don't want her. *(To the cooler.)* I'm sorry Janine.

MONA: Of course you do. It's all you've talked about—

SR: I thought I wanted her—it, but now....no.

MONA: But you need each other.

SR: How can you say that?

MONA: Because, you're good together.

SR: No we're not. *(She hits the cooler.)* Suck it! *(To MONA)* See, she brings out the worst in me.

*SR pushes the cooler away aggressively. It bangs into furniture or flips over. Something violent.*

MONA: This can't be good for your heart!

SR: So?

MONA: You used to be so poetic, with limbs that never fell asleep. And bright purple plaid.

*SR is behind a chair, putting as much space between her and the cooler as she can. She doesn't even want to look at it.*

SR: But she led me into painful situations. And I'm functioning fine without her.

MONA: You're hiding behind a chair, and sleeping on a strange woman's couch. And you don't care about anything.

SR: Yeah. And like you said, a lot of people would envy that.

MONA: I didn't—that's not what...

*MONA brings the cooler over to SR.*

Just take a look at her.

*SR peers in, and they take a peek. MONA might give it a gentle poke.*

SR: Ewwwww.

MONA: It's an organ, were you expecting a Valentine?

SR: There's a reason people keep their hearts hidden in their chests. Gross.

MONA: I think she's beautiful. Come on. I can't take anymore night weeping—

SR: —I stopped.

MONA: No, you didn't.

SR: OK, fine. I'll leave. But I don't want that...that thing.

MONA: Alright. But can you do me a favour?

SR: What?

*MONA takes the heart out of the cooler and throws it.*

MONA: Catch!

*SR does. She can't help it.*

SR: Bah! *(Beat Something changes.)* Wait.

MONA: What?

SR: I remember where my apartment is. I need to go feed my fish.

*SR's heart goes back into the cooler (for portability).*

*As MONA helps her collect her things to go:*

MONA: I should get a fish.  
I should get two.

SR: You should.

MONA: Is three too many?

SR: Not if you feed them. And give them different names.

MONA: I suppose I could do that. OK.

*Once she's ready, MONA hands her the cooler. She takes it.*

SR: Thank you.

MONA: You're welcome.

*They look at each other.*

SR: Anabel. That's my name. You asked before.

MONA: Anabel. Mona. *(beat)* Nice to meet you.

SR: Nice to meet you too. Bye.

*SR exits with all her things.*

*MONA watches her leave and picks up the phone. She hits speed dial.*

MONA: It's me. I was wrong.

*Lights out on MONA.*

## Scene Fifteen

*GEORGE appears.*

GEORGE: Dear Subway Ri—Anabel,  
So, I really like your jacket. And your heart too. I'm going to write a song  
and call it "Janine".

Because, you set something off in me I didn't even know I possessed.  
Fireworks in my chest. And they do not give me indigestion, they make  
me walk faster and hope. I took the plastic wrap off my comforter. I don't  
need to drink coffee in bed, when I wake up now, I'm awake.  
And I've started wearing a red and black houndstooth scarf, because I like  
the way it looks. I like it. I feel good sometimes. I feel.

Your letters define emotion so much better than any dictionary. And  
maybe...maybe now that I am learning about my own heart...I have  
called him Winston...maybe one day we could fill places in each other's  
lives; we could trespass into each other's hearts...and then colour them in.  
Like a child with some crayons and an anatomy book...? OK, you're better  
at this than me.

But, see, love is something so big that I don't know if I am capable of it.  
But I will try. Like you, I'll try.  
Thank you. Say hi to Janine.  
Subway Rider in Red and Black Houndstooth.  
George.  
And Winston too.

## Scene Sixteen

*ANABEL is back on the subway, purple plaid jacket in tact. She reads a book.*

*Doors open: "Ding." GEORGE enters the subway car.*

*They are on the subway together. They don't realize for a moment—  
"Ding-Dang-Dong."*

*The subway shifts. Their eyes meet.*

*ANABEL moves her bag for GEORGE to sit next to her.  
We are in in black before we know whether or not he does.*

**End of Play.**