

TO LIFE WITH LOVE

By Jerold London

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jlondon@deepweaversfaith.com



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**Let the mare in the field
in the summer morning mist
make you whinny. Make you come
to the fence and whinny. Let birds.**

– Linda Gregg, Let Birds, 1994.

**The privacy of them had a river in it.
Had our universe in it. And the way
its border looks back at us with its light.
This was finally their freedom.
The freedom an oak tree knows.
That is built at night by stars.**

– Linda Gregg, The Weight, 1994.

**If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down,
we should give thanks that the end had magnitude.**

– Jack Gilbert, A Brief for the Defense, 2005

TO LIFE WITH LOVE
(Paying homage to the poet Linda Gregg)

TIME AND PLACE

Late 1980s to 1994.

A university town in New England.

A passenger train, the Lake Shore Limited, Manhattan to Chicago, from New York City to Chicago's Union Station; and a Chicago wine bar.

The stage is minimal, with a platform, **stage right** (running perpendicular to the front of the stage) roughly 15 inches higher than the stage floor.

CHARACTERS

LINDA, 20s, a poet.

DAVID, 30s, also a poet. Linda's lover.

SUGAR, 30s. David's wife.

CAROLE, 20s. Linda's friend.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

SCENE 1

SUGAR is on the phone in one of the rooms of her house. Maybe smoking a cigarette as she talks.

SUGAR

What a dump!... What a dump this is.
On that grand poet's salary of yours.

Pause.

I know you have, David. I'm not an imbecile.
And what a dump we live in on both your incomes.

Pause.

SUGAR

Don't "Oh Sugar" me. That's not my name anyway.
All I know is that I can't stand it anymore with your sorry ass excuses.
You're a failure.
A fucking failure.
And boring.
Boring.
[stretched out] Boring.
Fucking B.O.R.I.N.G.

Pause.

Go find yourself a whore.
Or better yet, go fuck yourself.

Pause.

And don't come in here trying to butter my flies.
If you don't earn any money

Pause.

I mean *real* money.
You know what that means?...
No, of course you don't.

Pause.

How did I ever get stuck being a hungry poet's wife?

**SUGAR picks up a knife and stabs it into
the table.**

SUGAR

I've heard all that before.
Things haven't gotten any better in the last seven years, and they won't in the
next seven. I'm tired of it.

Pause.

What I want you to do is go to your father, and ask him for a loan....
A *real* loan. Not that penny-ante shit he's given you before.

Pause.

SUGAR

A million.
How's that, for a starter?
We could go a few places on that.

Pause.

Me?
Me, get a job?
Are you fucking crazy, David?
I didn't get married to get a job.

Pause.

“For better or for worse, till death do us part”?
Is that what you're saying?
Is that the only thing?
That's why you stay?

Pause.

Well, fuck you.
I expect more than that.

**SUGAR slams down the receiver, and
throws the phone against the wall.**

SCENE 2

**DAVID and LINDA are two participants
in a poetry reading.**

**She sits as he stands at the podium and
reads, and he sits as she stands at the
podium and reads.**

DAVID

[*reading*] Disturbing love, leave my pain alone
To suffer itself without further sting.

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is:
Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.

Confess it! This cannot be said
A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead;
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay! Three lives in one flea spare
Where we almost—nay, more than—married are:
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage-bed and marriage-temple is.

**Applause as DAVID sits and LINDA
walks up to the podium.**

LINDA

[*reading*] Everything formal.
The man turns around
and makes a sound.
It is a long cry.
The woman turns around
so you can see her face.
The look on her face
is the sound he made.

**Applause as LINDA sits and DAVID
returns to the podium.**

DAVID

[reading] In my waking fancy of a morning
I find an apparition of my love sleeping in my bed,
Like some visitation, the gentleness in her,
The bliss that I shall never find until she's real.
Now gone. Bring back the fire and her.

And in the afternoon I gaze upon her swimming,
Those naked watery drops touching her skin and hair
Watching the yearning in my mind like the huge sky
That rests on the other side of my reverie.
My rainbow of desire to her.

**Applause as DAVID sits and LINDA
returns to the podium.**

LINDA

[reading] Does the soul care about the mightiness
of love? No. The soul is a place
and love must find its way there.
The soul must be experienced to be achieved.
If he should love me as much as he will say he does
then he will stay, and we shall make a place
of that ripeness the soul speaks about.

Applause as LINDA sits.

SCENE 3

DAVID and LINDA are standing at the counter in a coffee shop.

Each pick up their cup of coffee and a donut, and sit together at the same table.

DAVID

I'm sorry.
Have we met before?
If we have, I can't believe I've forgotten it.

LINDA

Hi!
I'm Linda.
And a great fan of your poetry.

DAVID

Same here....
Oh.
I'm David.
As I guess you've guessed.

LINDA extends her right hand; and they shake.

LINDA

Nice to meet you, David.

DAVID

The pleasure is mine.

LINDA

[*beat*] I like John Donne, too.

DAVID

You noticed.

LINDA

How could I not?

DAVID

No one else seemed to.

LINDA

I'm no one else.

DAVID

I've noticed.

LINDA

[*beat*] My favorite poem of yours is The Astronaut.

DAVID

It's not a poem. It's a paragraph story.

LINDA

My favorite, nevertheless.

DAVID

Why?

LINDA

Because I've felt like that.

DAVID

Like a robot?

Caught, in an unmanned space ship, going forever outside our solar system,
never to return?

LINDA

Lonely.

For a companion who sees what I see, and can feel my feelings, too.
It's rare.... It's a rare bird.

DAVID

That's all the robot asks for.

An artificial mind, like his, who can share his eternal experience.

LINDA

Was it travelling in interstellar space, alone, that did that to him?

DAVID

What do you think?

LINDA

I think I don't know. Or can't know.

I can't imagine thinking without feelings, like a robot.

DAVID

Can you imagine travelling forever, eternally discovering new things?

LINDA

No.

DAVID

Or being created by a Doctor Frankenstein?

LINDA

No. Not that, either.

DAVID

Or wanting revenge for being created?

LINDA

Nope.

Because life is short enough for us humans, not wanting revenge for my misfortunes, whatever they may be.

DAVID

Do you ever think about scientists someday building a robot who can think like a human?

LINDA

I have, yes, once or twice. Actually ... what modern-day poet hasn't?

DAVID

And the robot with its ... its ... call it "artificial intelligence."

Can you imagine a robot's need to expand into the entire universe, searching to find something that thinks like him?

LINDA

Only if intelligence alone can create feelings.
Which I don't believe it can.

DAVID

What about Hal?

LINDA

In 2001?

DAVID

The same.

LINDA

That's what I think about Arthur Clarke.

DAVID

[*beat*] I don't get it? What do you mean?

LINDA

An introvert in paradise.

DAVID

In paradise?

LINDA

In a dreamland, overly stimulated.

DAVID

Wow!! Really?!

LINDA

Are you married, David?

DAVID

Does Satan live in Hell?

LINDA

That bad, huh?

DAVID

Worse ... maybe. Hell hath no fury like a woman, they say.
But I haven't graduated to the big place yet, so I can't be sure which is worse.
Wherever it is. And maybe Satan's a woman to boot. Who knows?

LINDA

Maybe only
What did you call it?
Artificial Intelligence? Was that it?

DAVID

Yeah.
"Artificial Intelligence."

LINDA

Catchy phrase, that.
I like it.

DAVID

I'm pleased you do.

LINDA

But as I was saying:

Maybe only Artificial Intelligence can accurately place where the real Hell is, and what it's like.

DAVID

You're not married, are you?

LINDA

How can you tell?

From my eyes?

DAVID

No.

From your hands.

LINDA

O the hands of a woman that tell no lies!

DAVID

But the eyes

LINDA

[*beat*] What *do* you think of a woman's eyes?...

As a poet.

DAVID

They are windows.

LINDA

To the soul?

DAVID

To that, I suppose ... as the saying goes.

But for sure, to her heart.

And to such a tangle of webs.

LINDA

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!"

That kind of tangle?

DAVID

What else?

LINDA

Is that what you see when you look into my eyes?
Lies?

DAVID

Pause, looking.

No.
Actually, I see a strong will to do.
With a soul to dare.
And the grace to care
About others' rue.

LINDA

You are clever with words, aren't you?

DAVID

John Donne was a penniless poet much of his life.

LINDA

Money, money, money, money:
Money makes a head turn 'round.

DAVID

He fell in love with a girl he loved more than anything in this life.
More even than his words.
Though her family disapproved.
Married her in secret.
And the pair of them proceeded to produce ten children born alive, and two not.

LINDA

Penniless?

DAVID

For the most part, much of the time.
No man is an island.
And few as poor as John Donne.

LINDA

That's a harsh test to put a poet's love through.
Don't you think?

DAVID

In my ear.
Every day.

LINDA

Oh!

DAVID

Three of his kids died before age ten.
Leaving him, a devastated father.
No money to bury a child.
No words worth mouthing to ease the pain.
It nearly drove him insane.

LINDA

No hope at the window either, I suppose.

DAVID

Nothing but a leaky umbrella next to it, to keep body and soul together.

LINDA

It makes you wonder, doesn't it? Macbeth.
About life's being a tale told by an idiot.

DAVID

Whether eyes are really windows of the soul, or windows of hunger and need.

LINDA

Which is no part of a robot's eyes....
So, as I said before, I don't believe intelligence is what creates feeling.

DAVID

Dumb animals have feelings. Feel pain, and loss.
But they don't talk about it.
So, no, I have to agree with you: Intelligence is not the source of feelings.

LINDA

Nor God, either.

DAVID

Agreed.

LINDA

So, what is?

DAVID

Bodies.
Dogs' bodies.
Cats' bodies.
Lambs' bodies.
Our bodies.

LINDA

Robots have bodies.

DAVID

Living bodies I mean. Breathing bodies. Hungry bodies.

LINDA

You can't feel sorry for something that doesn't have a living body, can you?

DAVID

Even if it's heading into infinity with no return ticket.

LINDA

Unless it catches on to what's going in.

DAVID

Like my robot Astronaut.

LINDA

How did he catch on?

DAVID

He became aware.
Conscious of his whereabouts.

LINDA

But how?

DAVID

He started to remember a mouse.
In the laboratory, where he was born.
Watching it move.
Watching it squeak.
Watching it worry.

LINDA

How could something like that bring him to consciousness?

DAVID

The movements. Something in the movements.
I don't know the rest.
Women know better than I about mice.
It's in the gut.
Just, all of a sudden, the robot knew it was never coming back.
Would eventually die from lack of energy, and never see a living mouse again.

LINDA

Can a robot see the future?

DAVID

The only way to see the future is to invent it.

LINDA

What God does. Is that what you mean?

DAVID

The future is not a concern of God's.
We're the ones who worry about it.
Like our weight. Or what to wear to a party.
God could care less about the future.
Or the present. Or the past. They are all the same to him.

LINDA

But your robot figured out its future.

DAVID

His own future.
A reasonable conclusion, considering where he was, and the way things were going.

LINDA

Artificial Intelligence is going to be a scary thing, someday.

DAVID

Indeed.

LINDA

Not like trees.

DAVID

No. Not like trees. Not spiritual like a quiet forest can be.

LINDA

And if robots figure out someday they're doomed to die, what then?

DAVID

You can imagine the fear of it.

LINDA

The senselessness of it.

All that effort, and to be heard no more.

DAVID

Like us ... not including famous poets, of course. They get heard.

But obviously we can only guess at this. Not being robots ourselves.

LINDA

Believing we're not.

DAVID

Oh, I think life's more than an illusion.

LINDA

Some people say.

DAVID

Like some people say we're just a dream in Buddha's mind.

LINDA

Who dreams of us as we dream of others.

DAVID

Who have dreams of their own.

LINDA

And on and on.

DAVID

That's what we poets do, isn't it?

Dream on and on.

LINDA

A Midsummer Night's Dream.

DAVID

Don Quixote.

LINDA

Heathcliff.

DAVID

Lord Byron.

LINDA

Dostoevsky, even.

DAVID

Well, I don't know about Dostoevsky.

But I dare say that for all the love that lovers have sacrificed we poets have built a wall of honor to them. At the border of emotion. Their names on it. Starting with Romeo and Juliet, and Anna Karenina.

LINDA

And Lancelot and Guinevere, surely.

DAVID

Surely.

And with them we are swept into the arms of passion, ultimately chastised by the robot within us who utters one word: Illogical.

LINDA

Life's too short for that.

DAVID

Either life's too short; or life's too long. I'm not sure which, being married. Seems one way one day to me, and the other the next.

LINDA

Sad, isn't it?

DAVID

A robot's sadness, realizing what his creator has done to him.

LINDA

Sailing through space in hopes of meeting his soul at an oasis.

DAVID

[*beat*] I need an oasis.

LINDA

Fish in the water?

DAVID

[beat] You're a whale, Linda, I suppose you know that.
A whale of a good listener.

LINDA stands.

LINDA

It's been an experience.
You just never know, do you?

DAVID stands.

DAVID

Life's a mystery. Thank God.
Marriage is a mystery. No thanks needed.
Love is a mystery. And few have any clue.

LINDA

And it all comes back to the oasis, doesn't it?

DAVID

[beat] Let me have your number.

LINDA

I don't think that's quite a good idea.

DAVID

It's a worse one not to have your number.

LINDA

I suppose so.

They exchange numbers.

LINDA

Goodbye, David.

DAVID

For now, Linda.

LINDA

We'll see.

LINDA exits.

SCENE 4

**LINDA is standing outside a toy store,
alone, nearly in tears.**

DAVID enters and walks up to her.

DAVID

What's up?

LINDA

She's in tears.

DAVID

She being ...?

LINDA

My little sister.

Adopted sister.

Eight.

Inside the toy store.

With Mother.

Crying.

DAVID

She's afraid of toys?

LINDA

She She's not afraid of toys, you fool!

We've saved a year with her for her special, dream doll.

And now they say they don't sell it anymore.

And she's heart-broken.

DAVID

There's nothing else?

LINDA

They're looking.

DAVID

If you had change enough for just one phone call, would this be it?

LINDA

Yes.

DAVID

And what if I didn't happen to live in the neighborhood?

LINDA

I would have known it, and not called you.

DAVID

[beat] Who *are* you?

LINDA

Your biggest fan....
But it's the wrong question.
The right one is: Who is my sister?

DAVID

And?

LINDA

She's Maria....
When we adopted her, I mean when my parents did, other adopting parents would say they "just knew" their child was the one "just meant" for them, the moment they saw the photo.
Ridiculous, we thought.
But didn't say so out loud, of course.
Because a child's "just meant" to be with her birth parents.
Adoption is man-made.
And then we saw a photo of Maria.
From an orphanage in Central America.
And we "just knew."
All of us did.
In an instant.

DAVID

Impressive.

LINDA

Something a robot cannot do.

DAVID

You remembered.

LINDA

And Maria "just knew" this doll was hers.

DAVID

How?

LINDA

From her eyes to the color of her skin.
And now she's gone.

DAVID

And you called me.
Whom you've met just once.

LINDA

I haven't forgotten.

DAVID

Nor I.

LINDA

Can you help?
I sort of thought you could.

DAVID

What made you think that?

LINDA

You seem so good at solving problems.

DAVID

Christ!! If you only knew....
But this one I think I *can* solve.

LINDA

I knew it!

DAVID

Go back in and get the full name and specifics of the thing.
Everything.
Make.
Model.
Company.
Vin number and year.

LINDA

I knew you'd help.

I know a bear.

DAVID

And you'll find the doll for her?

LINDA

I will.

DAVID

You promise?

LINDA

I promise.

DAVID

I'll be right back.

LINDA

LINDA exits into the store.

SCENE 5

LINDA is waiting outside the same toy store, alone.

DAVID enters carrying a box, and walks up to her.

LINDA

[*excitedly*] You have it?

DAVID

As Satan is home in Hell, I do.

LINDA

That's fantastic!
How'd you do it?

DAVID

I know a bear.

LINDA

A magic bear?

DAVID

None other.

LINDA

The cross-eyed one?

DAVID

Yep. You know him, too?

LINDA

Yep.

DAVID

You should have called him.

LINDA

I much preferred calling you.

DAVID

Yep. Me, too.

LINDA

Except, most of the magic in my life I've had to make myself.
And it's so nice to have another person carry the wand for a change.

DAVID

You *do* have the knack.

LINDA

As do you, obviously.

DAVID

Anything that's unusual enough will seem magical to the naked or needy eye.

LINDA

It doesn't have to grab you by the throat?

DAVID

Like when you called me?
That was magical.

LINDA

I missed talking with you.

DAVID

About robots?

LINDA

We're not like them, I told you.

DAVID

We're not robots because we have living bodies attached.
As well as intelligence and consciousness.

LINDA

And we're not gods, because we have such limited powers, though we can share.

DAVID

And we're not some detached soul-like things rattling around in a cage, because
life's a cage without bars.
Mine has teeth, though.

LINDA

Fear and loneliness are just as good as bars.

Loneliness, and love. **DAVID**

The longing for it. **LINDA**

You know? **DAVID**

Long ago people created gods not to be alone in this ball of confusion. **LINDA**

And forced them to have human feelings. **DAVID**

And God became man. **LINDA**

Lived and died as a man. **DAVID**

That's the way the story goes. **LINDA**

And returned to life. **DAVID**

[*beat*] Do you think *we* return to life? **LINDA**

We do if we believe we do. **DAVID**

Where? **LINDA**

If you're fortunate enough to really find love, you'll know where. **DAVID**

Do *you* know where? **LINDA**

I've only really made love in the wilderness of my mind. **DAVID**

LINDA

An explorer's mind.

DAVID

Who reads poetry, and select Bible verses.

LINDA

Who lives poetry.

DAVID

On a clear day, my Dear, poetry and certain Bible verses can see forever.

LINDA

To the ends of the Earth.

DAVID

And on a clear day God will make love.

LINDA

And know it.

DAVID

And that's good enough for me.

LINDA

But is it spiritual enough for you, David?

DAVID

Love is what's spiritual for me. Clearly.

But clearly? Really? I'm not so clear on the subject. It may be more instinct. All I know is: If I should find the person whom I'll know in an instant could be the love of my life, it will be my greatest spiritual moment if she loves me back. And every moment thereafter, being with her, making love with her. Blurring bodies and lives together. That's spiritual in my book. However, being shy of that, it's children that give me a spiritual feeling today. "Truly I say to you, except you become in your heart as a little child, you will never know the kingdoms of heaven."

LINDA

Is love sex?

DAVID

It wasn't sex that haunted Heathcliff to death, was it?
Or brought Brigadoon back to Earth? Sex is a window to the soul.

LINDA

“Sex is a window to the soul”?
You’re a hopeless, foolish romantic, David.

DAVID

Indeed, at heart, I am.

LINDA

Then tell me now:
Why are you playing the part of a fly, caught in a spider’s web?

DAVID

All of us like me, I believe, are middle twelve and serious.
We fall to our knees before honor and duty.
And the fear of failing it.
I made a vow; and I honor my vows. Even poisonous ones.
Till death.

LINDA

Then you’ve come to it:
The death of your happiness.

DAVID hands the box to LINDA; and she takes it.

DAVID

Here.
For Maria.

LINDA

How much do we owe you.

DAVID

Nothing.
It’s a gift.

LINDA

I can’t accept that.

DAVID

I’m sorry, but you must. It’s for Maria.

LINDA

When will I see you again?

DAVID

This is beginning to tear me up inside, Linda.

LINDA

You think you're the only one?

DAVID pauses, nearly taking LINDA into his arms.

But he resists.

DAVID

I can't tell you when.

But when....

We'll see.

DAVID turns and exits, as LINDA watches him go.

SCENE 6

DAVID and LINDA are again participating in a poetry reading.

DAVID comes up to the podium as LINDA stands to the side.

DAVID

[reading] It's not that rare
I write for you in midnight air,
My alluring, secret Muse.

But in the dark?
By some exploding spark of light,
As a monkey in my shoes.

Applause as DAVID stands to the side and LINDA walks up to the podium.

LINDA turns to look at DAVID for a few moments.

He returns her look.

Then she reads.

LINDA

The word "boulevard" comes to mind.
Standing on the side of the fountains in Paris,
where the water blew onto me when I was fifteen.
It was night.
It was dark then too and I was alone.
Why didn't you find me? Why didn't
somebody find me all those years?

LINDA stands aside.

Applause.

LINDA and DAVID face each other.

Suddenly they embrace and kiss with a passion as though they never want the kiss to end.

LINDA

Still in David's arms.

Why did we meet at the toy store when you brought me the bear for Maria?
I mean to say, the doll.
Maria's doll.
She loves it.
It's perfect.
And I forgot to tell you Thank You.

DAVID

I think you have.

LINDA

They will remember this poetry reading for a long time.

DAVID

I will, too.
Till my final day.
When I will be there, to remind you, how much I still love you.

They kiss again.

SCENE 7

Between scenes is the sound of a telephone ringing.

DAVID and LINDA are walking in the country.

A rectangular haystack is on the platform.

They come to it, undress, and disappear inside of it, making love.

SCENE 8

Between scenes is the sound of a telephone ringing.

LINDA is participating in a poetry reading.

She comes up to the podium.

LINDA

Two horses were put together in the same paddock.
Night and day. In the night and in the day
wet from heat and the chill of the wind
on it. Muzzle to water, snorting, head swinging
and the taste of bay in the shadowed air.
The dignity of being. They slept that way,
knowing each other always.
Withers quivering for a moment,
fetlock and the proud rise at the base of the tail,
width of back. The volume of them, and each other's weight.
Fences were nothing compared to that. People were nothing.
They slept standing,
their throats curved against the other's rump.
They breathed against each other,
whinnied and stomped.
There are things they did that I do not know.
The privacy of them had a river in it.

If I could have a lover last a lifetime,
or have a love that lasts a lifetime,
I'd have them both to last a lifetime.

There is no greater love a woman can have
than that she change her life for her lover.

When all this life has blown to leaves
and none, or few, do hang upon these boughs,
a love remains to tell me he still loves.

LINDA exits to applause.

SCENE 9

SUGAR and DAVID are in a room together. She is smoking a cigarette.

SUGAR

You're an asshole, David.
A flaming, cheating asshole.

DAVID

You don't know that.
Why do you say that, Sugar?

SUGAR

Don't "Sugar" me.

She slaps him.

He rubs his face numerous times during the remainder of the scene.

SUGAR

You think I'm stupid?

DAVID

No.

SUGAR

As stupid as that bitch of yours?

DAVID

I don't know what you mean.

SUGAR

What's her name?

DAVID

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

SUGAR

The name of that bitch you're screwing.

DAVID

I am not.

SUGAR

Don't screw around with me.
I'm no imbecile.

DAVID

What started this?

SUGAR

I have ears.
And friends.
People tell me things.
And I've heard what you've been up to, behind my back.

DAVID

Who?
Who's been saying things?

SUGAR

None of your beeswax.

DAVID

Well it's a lie.

SUGAR

Said the spider to the fly.

DAVID

What else do you want me to say?
It's not true.
And I'm telling you it's not true....
They're making it up.
Or they're just mistaken.
You know how people can be.

SUGAR

I know how *men* can be.
Husbands.

DAVID

I've never cheated on you.

SUGAR

You'd stake your life on it?

DAVID

Yes.

SUGAR

Well you'd better.
Because if I ever caught you, you're a dead man.
Got that?

DAVID

I've got that.
Loud and clear.

SUGAR

I've read your so-called "poetry" and I know a thing or two about metaphors.

DAVID

Well it's a lie.
I mean what those people of yours told you.

SUGAR

And whose number is this?

SUGAR shows DAVID the paper LINDA gave him five years before, with her number on it.

DAVID

Where did it come from?

SUGAR

You tell me. It was in your pants pocket.

DAVID looks at the paper.

DAVID

I'm not sure I remember.
It must have been a long time ago.
Probably the number of some person who wanted me to read at some poetry open-mike event.
I don't know.

SUGAR

Well, I'm going to call, and find out.
You stand warned. Understand?

I stand warned.
I understand.

DAVID

Good.

SUGAR

**SUGAR turns and throws the ashtray at
the wall.**

The next time it's your head.

SUGAR

SCENE 10

DAVID and LINDA are enjoying a candlelit dinner together, complete with wine.

The telephone begins ringing.

DAVID

Let it ring.
This is *our time* together.
Our five year anniversary; and I don't want any interruption.

LINDA

It could be my mother.
Or my sister.

DAVID

Please, Darling.
Whoever it is, they can call back tomorrow.
We might have gone out to eat, where you wouldn't hear the phone.
I love you, Linda; and I want tonight to be ours alone.

LINDA

I want that, too, David.
Even more so.
I want tons more of nights to be ours alone.

DAVID

You know I do what I can.
I am what I am.

LINDA

You are what you are.
I know you are. What you are.
A married man.

DAVID

Who's crazy about you, body and soul.

LINDA

The soul is a place love must find its way to.
It must be experienced to be achieved, David.

DAVID

We've achieved a lot.

LINDA

We've drawn circles around achievements. That's all.
And we *have* achieved some of them.
Naming the face of the Earth, like the man in the moon, is one.

DAVID

You pressed your face against my chest, when we gave up the summer place by the lake.
Remember? There was darkness under the trees.
And one of those birds in a bush as soon as it got light.
Our hearts never tired.
Our passion has never tired.
Naked in bed, me clapping at you.
Loving everything about you.
That's never gotten lost.

LINDA

Oh, let them burn!
Let the shadowed building by the lake burn. Let the lion house burn.
Let the old, poor, wooden house where I stayed go up in flames.
Let them all burn.

DAVID

No!!

LINDA

Not to destroy them, but to give them the life my life gives them in my memories.

DAVID

Let them. But love me.
Love me. Keeping loving me! That's all I ask.

LINDA

What if I loved myself more?
What if I make my own world? If I make a garden?
Would you stay longer with me then?

DAVID

I'm so confused. Really, I am.

LINDA

It's the emptiness.
Not the fullness you make me feel when we're together.
But the emptiness I feel when we're apart.

DAVID

I understand.
But what can I do, when there's only one of me?

LINDA

I have always longed for you and for your approval.
Wanted you to understand the hugeness of love the way I do.
The meaning of it.
But I don't think you do.

DAVID

I understand the hugeness of now.
The meaning of now....
But all I can do is be with you when I'm with you, Linda.
And love you the same as I always have. And always will.

LINDA

I don't want anything less than what we have, David.
I want more.
So many places to go.
So many new places to see, and feel.

Give me something tangible to prove this secret.
This illicit love.
Something big enough, made of actual things.

DAVID

I've given you my body, and its love everlasting.
What more is my body good for?

LINDA

If this is a permanent token of our love, then I don't know what.
What am I supposed to do with it?
Where am I supposed to go?
Having you this way is a camouflage for the emptiness to come.
Not having you is unthinkable.
I need you now more than I ever have.
I'm married to air, as close as I'll ever come to the edge of not going crazy.

DAVID

What's gotten into you tonight, Lid?
This is supposed to be a celebration.

LINDA

Fear, maybe.
The telephone at this strange hour, maybe.
I've been thinking today:
What have these five years left for us to know our lives with?
Memories. Only memories.

DAVID

What does any everlasting love leave?
Memories.

LINDA

Love and hunger are what bring people together, David,
and people are brought together for a purpose.
There is no purpose in your marriage to Sugar.
You owe your love to me to be with me.

**DAVID reaches over and takes Linda's
hand.**

DAVID

I have wondered much of my life what we owe to love.
Everything?
Or just to enjoy and cherish the moment for what it is?
And I think I understand:
What we owe to love is humility for the moment. To love the moment with every
fiber in our body. And gratitude that we've ever been loved at all.

The telephone rings again.

DAVID

Just let it be.
It'll keep for tomorrow.

LINDA

I don't like the sound of it.
I don't like the smell of it.

SCENE 11

SUGAR is on the phone in one of the rooms of her house. Smoking a cigarette as she talks.

SUGAR

Hello?
Hello?

Pause.

Is this what's-her-name?

Pause.

I don't know her name.
I only know she's been fucking my husband, and this is her number.

Pause.

I don't have the wrong number.
My husband has the wrong woman.

Pause.

A whore.
A bitch. A cow. A slut. A stinking, street-walking whore.

Pause.

I could care less that your room is empty.
Just a chair or two, a table, and a fucking bed.
What difference is that to me?
You should die. You should kill yourself; or somebody should.

Pause.

Me??? Evil?
You're the evil one, Shit-face.

Pause.

Is that what you want your husband to do?
In the improbable event *you'll* ever be married.

SCENE 12

Just a chair or two (with a red throw pillow on one), a table (with a vase on it, white flowers in the vase), and a bed.

DAVID and LINDA are alone. [It's as much in Linda's memory as in actual time, and the lighting and other stage effects accentuate the fact.]

LINDA is in tears.

DAVID comes to her and attempts to wipe and kiss the tears away.

DAVID

I just can't.

LINDA

What are we going to do?

What am I going to do, David, if we can't be with each other anymore?

Suddenly LINDA breaks away from DAVID, grabs the red throw pillow from the chair, and begins hitting DAVID in the face with it.

DAVID wrestles the pillow from her hand and throws it offstage (possibly into the audience).

She pulls the white flowers from the vase and throws them in David's face.

DAVID covers his face with his arm and LINDA starts beating him on the chest.

He reaches to take hold of her arms and she slaps his arms and hands.

DAVID wrestles LINDA into a chair and holds her down in it. The two of them are both out of breath.

DAVID

You know why I can't, and you know there's nothing I can do.

LINDA

Because of *her*?
But she was always there.

DAVID

Goes to his knees, still holding LINDA down in the chair.

Not like she is now....
She knows. She might kill one of us.

LINDA

Let her kill me! Go ahead! Let her!
It's what *you're* doing, isn't it?
Only more slowly. It's as good as killing me.

DAVID

Try to be sensible.
I'm telling you, she's dangerous.

LINDA

I'm telling you I'm dying....
I'll die without your love.

DAVID

I'll always love you, Linda. You know that.

LINDA

How *should* I know?
I have to *feel* it to know it.
I have to feel your arms around me.
I have to feel the passion of your mouth on my breasts.
Your delight being in me.
The amazing smell of your sperm on my thigh.
The pleasure No! Not pleasure.
The divine joy of your joining us together the way you do.
It brings the feeling of God into me.
Don't you understand? *I need that, David.*
I need you.

DAVID

Please, Linda. This is hard enough for me.

LINDA

Don't leave me!
Please.
This is my life now.
I'm in it.
It's all I have, is you.
What you've left me.
And I'm in it.
Please.
I'm begging you, David.
Don't leave me.
Don't leave me empty.
Don't leave me with no surprises left.
You're what's kept my faith alive.
Don't you see that?
You're not just killing me.
You're killing my faith in God and Earth.
I can't go on without you.
How will I go on without you?

DAVID

You must.
I must.
I shall be just as miserable.
For the rest of my life.
I promise you that.

LINDA

Then see me.
We can work it so that she doesn't know.

DAVID

And risk her wrath.
And even a murder?

LINDA

I never thought this....
You're afraid of her.

DAVID

You would be, too.
You should be.

LINDA

[*pause*] Do you see what you've taught me?
You've taught me how alone I am.

DAVID

[*beat*] Is this how you want to remember us?

LINDA

No.

DAVID

Then stop hitting me, and calm down.

LINDA

[*beat*] Okay.

DAVID releases LINDA, and they both stand.

LINDA

Why can't you love me as much as I love you?
Why is that so impossible for you?

DAVID takes LINDA into his arms and they kiss. Long. Then they go together to the bed and begin undressing.

DAVID

We'll work out a final train trip together.
New York to Chicago.

LINDA

Just love me like it's the last time.

SCENE 13

1994.

DAVID and LINDA are aboard a train, the Lake Shore Limited, Manhattan to Chicago, just arriving at Chicago's Union Station.

LINDA is asleep across David's chest in the seat of a passenger car (the stage right platform).

DAVID

Linda!
Linda!
Wake up!
We're here!

LINDA

Waking.
[startled] What?!

DAVID

It's Chicago. The train's arriving.

LINDA

Rubbing her eyes.
O! my God, David!
Damn it!
Why did you wait so long?
How could you do that to me?
Our trip together, and you let me sleep away the last few hours?
You're terrible!

DAVID

You were exhausted.
I couldn't wake you, you were so peaceful.

LINDA

[beat] Is that a new vest you have on?

LINDA feels it.

DAVID

Uh-huh.
It's Chinese.

LINDA

The lining ... is it sheepskin?

DAVID

Yes.

LINDA

I knew I didn't recognize the smell.

DAVID

I've had it on the whole way.

LINDA

Look at me! So busy sleeping to notice you had a new vest.
And so busy staring out the window at those in-between places we went past,
with their backs turned to us.

DAVID

You called them something.

LINDA

The small, neglected stations of our history.

DAVID

Ah yes.... The small, neglected stations of our history.
Ever the poet.

They look long at each other.

DAVID

The train's stopped.

DAVID stands, gets his suitcase, takes the vest off, and hands it to LINDA.

LINDA stands, holding it.

DAVID

Linda?

Yes?

LINDA

DAVID takes her into his arms, and kisses her as though they would never see each other again.

Then he puts on his coat, picks his suitcase back up, and leaves.

LINDA stands by the seat dazed for a moment; then puts on the vest, her coat over it, gets her bag, and turns to look out a dirty window.

DAVID is outside on the platform, looking up at LINDA through the window. They look at each other without any expression.

DAVID walks away.

SCENE 14

Three months later.

A Chicago wine bar. CAROLE is seated at a table with a drink. LINDA enters.

CAROLE

Linda! Over here.

LINDA comes up to CAROLE. A glass of wine is waiting for LINDA at the table.

They hug, then both sit.

CAROLE

How have you been?
It's been months.

LINDA momentarily sobs, then catches herself.

CAROLE

What's wrong, Honey?

LINDA

[*beat*] We've left each other.

CAROLE

O my God! What happened?
You and David seemed so perfect together.

LINDA

We were, I guess.
But I guess you could say I was chosen by a lion I didn't know.
Dragged from the shining water at sundown and torn open.
I'm bloody; and the pain of losing him....
[*beat*] I loved him more than I can comprehend, and miss him more than I can almost bear.
I can't write anymore. Not even for a moment.

CAROLE

You came back so quietly, Girl, we thought you were still in the East.
Why didn't you call me? And tell me?

LINDA

I just couldn't talk about it, Carole. Not before today. Not to anybody.
I've been a wounded animal, hiding away, nursing my wounds.

CAROLE

Have you seen him? Or spoken at all?

LINDA

Not once, in three months.
And I started thinking this morning: Maybe this is it.
Maybe I'll have to accept never seeing him again, and go on living.
Maybe I need to say my goodbyes, and leave Chicago for a while. Go away.

CAROLE

You know you can come stay with us.

LINDA

I know; but no thanks.

CAROLE

Why did it happen like that?

LINDA

Nature, or God, maybe. The world's too willing to let love be destroyed.
Lovers, crying out each other's name. And no one hears. Not even an old chair.
The jet-black ewe sacrificed in the Italian light so that bees will swarm again.
Who knows? Who really cares?
The soul doesn't. The soul's a place love must find its way to.
People are the ones who must make a place for the ripeness the soul speaks of.

CAROLE

I care.... We love you, Linda.

LINDA

We planned it. From New York. Nineteen hours on the Lake Shore Limited.
Our final trip together; and then I'd give him ten minutes to meet his family.
It was in that last instant looking at him, I saw the absolute magnitude of my loss.

CAROLE

I don't understand why. You two seemed so much in love.

LINDA

I've never stopped loving him, Carole. Every fiber of me. And he loved me back.

CAROLE

So what went wrong?

LINDA

We could have been mistaken for a happily married couple, riding on that train.
But we were careless; and careless lovers are not protected.... His wife found out.

CAROLE

He was still married?! Jesus Christ, Linda, you never told me that!

LINDA

And she got my phone number. At the apartment. And called me.
She called me a whore.
Perhaps.... Perhaps that's what I am.
Jack told me it couldn't last. She was bound to catch on.
He said David won't be able to sustain the passion when it starts to cost him.
And Jack was right.
Privacy has a river through it that runs dry when the privacy dies.

It's been a piece of hell. The love. The fear. The pain.
And it's the pain now that reminds me most of David.
The empty room waiting for him.
The few days at a time, that became only hours, and then none.
That brutal phone call.
His voice. Not his voice. His words. Not his words.
Keep me, I pleaded. *Keep me.*
I don't want to go back to the smallness of a world without you....
I try to have the strength Jack had, losing his wife to cancer the way he did.
But not yet. It takes time to get over the shock of a journey's end.
That's why I have to get away, don't you see? David can find me if he needs to.
The thought of our room forever empty without him is destroying me.
I sometimes wake up screaming in the night. There's no poetry in a life like that.

CAROLE

My sweet Girl, what you've gone through!

LINDA

Five years, but it should have been ten. Should have been forever.
When I was fifteen, standing by the fountains in Paris, why didn't he find me
there? I understood love then. Like two whales. Like a train.

CAROLE

Like a train? What does that mean?

LINDA

Every time I hear the lonesome sound of trains at night I think of David.
The sheer power of them. The rhythm. The passage. The inevitability.
Miracles come in moments, Carole, and they can last a lifetime, I still believe.
Just as journeys begin with a single choice that changes your life.
And when they end, you may not know it for months.

CAROLE

But he was married, Linda! Maybe ... maybe it *wasn't* actually love.

LINDA

No! He did love me!

His love was overwhelming. His desire. His eagerness.
He became utterly wild with me. Taking me apart like a beast. And it never went
away. The passion never weakened between us. It only drew us closer.
Dear God, how he loved me! What a happiness then!
It was the most prodigious thing I ever experienced in my life....
Do you think I'll ever let myself give that up?
But now, never again lying in bed, hearing his key in the lock, and then seeing his
face at last, for the first time and only time. Briefly. Briefly.
Wanting him to devour me.
My nipples to bite; my body to possess; to lie buried within him.
No longer the amazing smell of sperm on my thighs.
No spreading it on my stomach to show pleasure.
Never again his falling asleep inside my breathing....

[beat] She'll kill him if he keeps seeing me.
And then my life would be a ghost story....

[beat] I think back to the last moment we looked at each other.
Like a photograph in my mind, through the dirty window of that train car.
That moment is what I will tell of, as proof that he loved me permanently.
After that I was a woman alone, carrying my bag, asking a worker which direction
to walk to find a taxi.

CAROLE

O! Linda! Linda! I'm so sorry for you. You've lost the love of your life.

LINDA

If that phrase weren't so hackneyed, I wouldn't say no....
[beat] Jack always said: "If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down, we should
give thanks that the end had magnitude."

SCENE 15

Return to Scene 13.

LINDA is asleep across David's chest in the seat of the a passenger car.

DAVID

Linda!
Linda!
Wake up!
We're here!

LINDA

Waking.
[startled] What?!

DAVID

It's Chicago. The train's arriving.

LINDA

Rubbing her eyes.
O! my God, David!...
Damn it!
Why did you wait so long?
How could you do that to me?
Our last trip together, and you let me sleep away the hours?
You're terrible!

DAVID

You were exhausted.
I couldn't wake you, you were so peaceful.

LINDA

[beat] Is that a new vest you have on?

LINDA feels it.

DAVID

Uh-huh. It's Chinese.

LINDA

The lining ... is it sheepskin?

DAVID

Yes.

LINDA

I knew I didn't recognize the smell.

DAVID

I've had it on the whole way.

LINDA

Look at me! So busy sleeping to notice you had a new vest.
And so busy staring out the window at those in-between places we went past,
with their backs turned to us.

DAVID

You called them something.

LINDA

The small, neglected stations of our history.

DAVID

Ah yes.... The small, neglected stations of our history.
Ever the poet.

They look long at each other.

DAVID

The train's stopped.... I love you.

DAVID stands, gets his suitcase, takes the vest off, and hands it to LINDA.

LINDA stands, holding it.

DAVID

Linda?

LINDA

Yes?

DAVID takes her into his arms, and kisses her as though they would never see each other again.

Then he puts on his coat, picks his suitcase back up, and leaves.

LINDA stands by the seat dazed for a moment; then puts on the vest, her coat over it, gets her bag, and turns to look out a dirty window.

DAVID is outside on the platform, looking up at LINDA through the window. They look at each other without any expression.

DAVID walks away.

Long pause.

LINDA

[to herself] That moment is what I will tell of, as proof that he loved me permanently.

After that the eclipse of my loneliness begins.

END