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Dramatic Publishing

IN THE MIDDLE OF GRAND CENTRAL STATION

Drama by
Nancy Pahl Gilsenan



The Dramatic Publishing Company

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(IN THE MIDDLE OF GRAND CENTRAL STATION)

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IN THE MIDDLE OF GRAND CENTRAL STATION

**A Drama in Two Acts
For Six Men, Six Women and Extras***

CHARACTERS

MARTY DE SILVA a fifteen-year-old runaway
JULIUS KARPOS a policeman
DIXON HANEY a social worker
DINO Marty's friend
EMILY DEMEREST a schoolgirl, 16-17 years old
PROFESSOR SEARSON a homeless, older man
ANNA DE SILVA Marty's mother
ERMA a homeless, older woman
PEARL a homeless woman
PEG a homeless woman
VINCE 15-25 years old
ERROL 15-25 years old

***Extras: Policemen, Homeless people, Commuters**

TIME: The present.

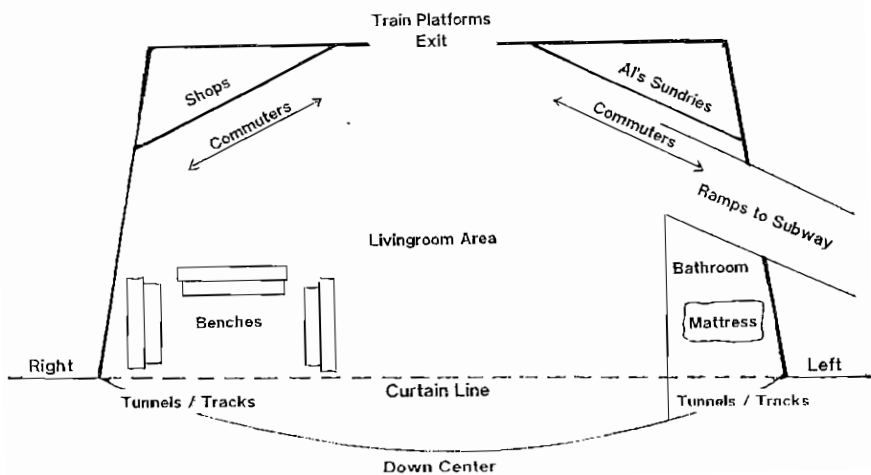
PLACE: Grand Central Station, New York City.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Marty is addicted to music. Although she uses it as a sedative, it begins to consume her, and, ultimately, it becomes her last refuge from reality. The stage directions sometimes describe the music as “loud” or “blaring.” These are sound levels in Marty’s mind, not in the theater. I intended to drive Marty crazy, not the audience. Anything you can do to create the illusion of volume is preferable to making the actual sound levels too loud.

Stage Chart

IN THE MIDDLE OF GRAND CENTRAL STATION



ACT ONE

SCENE: A sign which says Grand Central Station covers the top of the stage. The stage is dimly lit. The sound of departing and arriving trains rises in the background. Various HOMELESS PEOPLE are sitting on benches in the living room or propped up against the wall sleeping. JULIUS KARPOS, a policeman, stands in the background. DINO is seated in a corner. All figures are frozen. MARTY enters, wearing a cap, denim jacket, jeans or pants, and dark shoes. She carries a cassette tape player and backpack.

MARTY. Okay, let's not get too excited about my arrival. *(She looks around at the dim, frozen station.)* May I remind you this is a temporary visa, ladies and gentlemen? I am here on a visitor's pass only. No plans to stay any longer than is absolutely necessary. I promise. *(She sets down her backpack. When nothing moves, she yells.)* Are we dead in here, or what?! *(There is still no movement. She shakes her head and sighs.)* Jeez, how can you people live like this? *(She looks around again. Nothing changes. Enthusiastically.)* Music! Can't we at least have a little music around here? *(She turns on the tape player. Upbeat, smooth percussion rises in the background, then instrumental music begins. MARTY closes her eyes for a moment and lets her body sway to the rhythm, and the tension inside her lessens.)* Okay. Bet-

ter. Significantly bet-ter. *(She opens her eyes as the music continues and the lights begin to rise very slowly. MARTY looks around. She takes off her jacket and sets it down. She wears an over-sized, dark sweater underneath.)* It's warm. Let's give it that. And furnished. Decor la Publique Works. *(As the shop signs behind her begin to light.)* Close to fine dining. *(MARTY now walks over to the PEOPLE sleeping along the wall who are still frozen.)* Lots of company. *(She passes KARPOS.)* Twenty-four-hour security system. No commute and reasonable rates. *(She returns to her backpack and tape player. She takes out a package of cigarettes from her jacket pocket. This is the last cigarette. She lights it, inhales and smiles and the lights continue to rise very slowly.)* Why this is paradise. Am I right? Just add the music, and you folks have got heaven! *(COMMUTERS begin to move through the station mostly going from the trains out of the station. A few move the other direction. The sleeping PEOPLE begin to stir, as does KARPOS and DINO.)* There are not a lot of choices here. That is the point. One can rot at Good Shepherd, where the food is hot but the air is so close you can't breathe. Where they will intervene to save you from this and intervene to save you from that. Until you start to suffocate from their help and you finally die of intervention. Or you can go back to the hospital where you can sleep through the next sixty years and conveniently wake up dead. Where the worst they can say about you is you snored. And that is also the best they can say about you. Or you can go home. Unless, of course, you have smashed the color TV to smithereens when you threw it at your mother. And she's so scared of you, she has paid you twenty-five bucks to get the hell out.

Then you are honor bound NOT to go home. You are honor bound to find someplace else. *(She sits down.)* To wait. *(Beat.)* For what? For... *(Watching the COMMUTERS hurry by now, energetically.)* another place to go. Big destination. Right out of this place, and headed for romance, adventure, the Big Time. Complete with Prince Charming and the two-seater Mercedes. *(MARTY stands up on the bench and addresses EVERYONE in the station, which is now completely lit. The music has reached its peak. PEOPLE pass by, barely noticing her.)* Pardon me, you jerks of all trades, pass right by, please. Don't mind me. I'm just resting my butt. Taking a small vacation here at the Hotel Grande. Like I said, only a temporary stay. *(As she continues to be ignored.)* Did you hear that, ladies and gentlemen? I'M HERE JUST LONG ENOUGH TO FIGURE OUT WHICH ONE OF THESE TRAINS I'M SUPPOSED TO CATCH!!

(MARTY continues to stand on the bench, dancing. The music reaches a crescendo at the end and she freezes momentarily with her hands stretched in the air and her eyes closed, looking upward. KARPOS has approached her, along with HANEY. KARPOS tries to get her attention.)

KARPOS. Hey, Marty. Marty? MARTY! *(MARTY opens her eyes and looks at KARPOS.)* Are you practicing the ascension or what?

MARTY. You ever look up here, Julius? You know how high that ceiling is?

KARPOS. About five stories.

MARTY. This would be a helluva place to fly, Julius. Not enough people realize that.

KARPOS. One is plenty. I have enough trouble keeping you people off the floor. Who wants to drag you off the ceiling? Get down, will you?

MARTY (*as she jumps down*). For you, anything. I'm out of cigarettes, Julius.

KARPOS. It's nice how some things never change. Marty, I want you to meet somebody. This is Dixon Haney. He's the guy in charge of the Foodwagon Program. Dixon, Marta de Silva. He wants to ask you something.

MARTY. Good, then I want to ask him something.

KARPOS (*as he begins to walk back into the station*). Don't bother to ask him for cigarettes. He won't give you any. (*MARTY and HANEY sit down on the bench. She begins to root through her backpack.*)

MARTY. Dixon? Did your mother make that up?

HANEY. It's an heirloom. I was named after my great-grandfather.

MARTY. Did he leave you any money?

HANEY. No, just the name.

MARTY. Well, at least that's something. But the really lucky people get money, too. Are you one of the lucky people, Dixon?

HANEY. I guess not.

MARTY. Me, neither. You got a cigarette, Dixon?

HANEY. I don't smoke.

MARTY. Bad choice of words. Will you buy me a pack of cigarettes, Dixon?

HANEY. They're bad for you.

MARTY. So are your sandwiches.

HANEY. My sandwiches? You mean the Foodwagon?

MARTY. I thought you were the guy in charge.

HANEY. I am.

MARTY. Then as one who eats your sandwiches, I should be honest with you, Dixon. The wagon would be better named Sodium Central.

HANEY. Really?

MARTY. Those Vienna sausages? They're killers, Dixon. So is the deviled ham. And the processed cheese would melt ice. I have already suggested it to the high-way department.

HANEY. That bad?

MARTY. Old Erma there has a water retention problem. Did anybody bother to check that out? I bring her a sandwich from the wagon, and in two hours her legs are swelled up like balloons. I gotta carry her to the bathroom. And old man Searson won't touch anything but the bread. He spits everything else out.

HANEY. We do think about that, Marty, believe me. But almost everything we serve is donated. Salt is cheap and people donate cheap food.

MARTY. Okay. And you would rather serve cheap food than serve nothing. And Erma would rather eat cheap food than eat nothing. Am I right?

HANEY. Okay.

MARTY. Even if it's bad for her.

HANEY. Because under the circumstances, she doesn't have much choice.

MARTY (*standing up, triumphant*). All right! "Under the circumstances"! Score twenty points, Dixon, and advance to Al's Sundries. You are now free to buy me a pack of cigarettes.

HANEY. But eating is not the same as smoking, Marty.

MARTY. Have you tried your bologna on rye? Under the circumstances, I'd say smoking is safer. Come on,

DIXON. (*She takes his hand and pulls him up.*) I promise not to get cancer until after you go home.

(*They cross to Al's Sundries where DINO is hanging out near the entrance. KARPOS turns and watches them in amazement. HANEY reluctantly enters the shop and buys the cigarettes.*)

DINO. What a little charmer.

MARTY. Shut up, Dino.

DINO. I like the way you make him go into the store for you. Those guys can't say no to you, can they? You're just the Belle of Grand Central; the way you wrap every social worker around your little finger. Why don't you send me out for cigarettes sometime?

MARTY. I don't like what you smoke.

DINO. How do you know?

MARTY. Because I'm smart, Dino. Because you're gonna be hangin' around this place forever, and I'm not.

DINO. Touchy. You seem to be doing okay around this place.

MARTY (*turns on him, livid*). Not okay, Dino—brilliant. I am doing brilliant. Have you got that?

(*HANEY appears with the cigarettes.*)

HANEY. I can't believe I just did that.

MARTY (*taking the cigarettes*). An act of mercy, Dixon.
(*MARTY and HANEY return to the bench.*)

HANEY. How old are you, Marty?

MARTY (*as she puts the cigarettes into her backpack*).
Don't worry. Al sells me cigarettes all the time.

HANEY. Julius thinks I should find another place for you. He wants me to get you out of here.

MARTY. Can't do it. Sorry. Not unless two MD's say I'm an immediate danger to someone. Do I look dangerous, Dixon?

HANEY. Your family could move to have you committed.

MARTY. My mother already has. Four times. She's fed up. You're not gonna get her to do another thing.

HANEY. I talked to Halligan at Good Shepherd. He thinks you've got problems, but he likes you, Marty. He thinks they might be able to help you.

MARTY. They tried.

HANEY. So go back and try again.

MARTY. Air's too thick there, Dixon. I can't breathe. I know this will come as a shock to someone who probably sleeps on a Sealy Posturepedic, but I like it here. I'm free. I'm independent. I've got friends. I've even got a few people who need me.

HANEY. Dozens, according to Julius.

MARTY. So don't get all hot and bothered, okay? I'm fine.

HANEY. For how long?

MARTY (*shrugs*). A while. Until my father calls from Honolulu or something.

HANEY. Calls? Grand Central Station?

MARTY. He knows where I am. He'll find me, when he's ready.

HANEY. Marty, you're fifteen years old. Your mother hasn't heard from you in eight months. You haven't been in school for over two years. This is a public train station, kiddo. Half of New York City passes through here every day. Just what is it you think you're doing?

MARTY (*looks around her*). It's a waiting room, Dixon. So I guess I'm waiting.

(HANEY freezes in place and the lights dim on the area where he stands. MARTY picks up her tape player and backpack and walks over to an area along the wall where old MEN and WOMEN and burnt-out alcoholics sit. She sits down beside ERMA, who sits on a bench asleep. MARTY opens her backpack and takes out her new pack of cigarettes, lights one and sits back to think.)

MARTY. We need music, Erma. I hate it when it's so dull. All you can hear is feet—hundreds of those ugly wing-tip shoes on marble. Look at poor old Searson. Counting all those people with nothing decent to listen to. (*Yelling.*) We could use a little music here! (*MARTY turns on the tape player. A more subdued, but still rhythmic music rises. This relaxes MARTY and she closes her eyes for a moment.*) Have you ever been to Hawaii, Erma? Great beaches. Great sunshine. I saw it on one of those game show programs. They broadcast the whole thing outside, on the patio of some big hotel. I guess it never rains or something. (*She opens her eyes and looks straight ahead.*) My dad moved there. Ran off with this lady who owns a card shop. I think they have a beach house. He sent a picture of their dog. They have this cocker spaniel that gets sand in its ears all the time. You gotta be careful with animals on the beach. You gotta brush 'em every time you go. That's what his kids do. He has these two little kids, and they brush the dog every time they go to the beach. Oh, well, I don't even swim. Do you? (*She turns now to look at ERMA who continues to sleep.*) I bet you

lived in a beach house once, Erma. Naw. A castle, right? One of those German things on the Rhine. Lots of servants, four-poster bed, and a dog. A really big dog. No, six dogs. Six really big dogs. That sounds more like it. With silk sheets. *(She closes her eyes and leans back as if she, too, is asleep.)* God, how do people live without music?

(The sound of the music grows slightly louder. ERMA wakes, rises and walks away without MARTY responding. EMILY enters wearing her school uniform and carrying her books. She sits down next to MARTY. The music fades. SEARSON continues to write numbers in his book. EMILY rises, leaving her books, walks closer to him, just enough to get a better look at his face, then returns to sit down. MARTY's eyes are still closed.)

MARTY. He's adding up the numbers on the turnstiles.

EMILY. Pardon me?

MARTY. I said, he's been downstairs on the subway platform writing down all the numbers on the turnstiles. Now he's adding them up. He does it every morning. And every night.

EMILY. Oh. Do you know him?

MARTY. I know everybody.

EMILY. Oh.

(KARPOS now approaches SEARSON and begins to talk to him.)

EMILY. Are they going to arrest him? *(MARTY opens her eyes and watches.)*

MARTY. For what? Being crazy?

EMILY. Is he crazy?

MARTY. Everybody around here is crazy. It's a regular nursing home. Aren't you late for class or something?

EMILY. I'm suppose to be at the orthodontist in Stamford. I'm catching the 10:17.

MARTY. That where you live? *(EMILY nods and continues to watch SEARSON as KARPOS uses his night-stick to gesture. EMILY rises, concerned.)*

EMILY. Why's he shaking his stick?

MARTY. Dramatic effect.

EMILY. What?

MARTY. The old guy's not suppose to go down on the subway platforms. He almost fell on the tracks last week. Julius is trying to scare the hell out of him.

EMILY. That's abuse. Yelling like that is abusive.

MARTY. Maybe in Stamford. Here it's just another little daily act of mercy. You missed your train. *(KARPOS now walks away from SEARSON who remains seated. EMILY still stares at him.)* No skin off my nose.

EMILY *(turning to MARTY)*. I'm sorry?

MARTY. You missed your train, dumb ass. It's 10:22.

EMILY *(looking at her watch)*. Oh, no! You're right.

MARTY. Amazing thing; the way these street people can tell time. Gives you a whole new insight into the mind of the homeless, doesn't it? *(EMILY now turns to look at MARTY for the first time.)* Oh, well, it was only the orthodontist.

EMILY. Are you talking to me?

MARTY. It's a free country. Interpret it any way you want.

EMILY. You actually live here? In Grand Central Station?