

*(Lights up on ODETTA. Light shines through the window, illuminating the side of her face, one bare shoulder.)*

ODETTA

You ever meet someone— You know, somebody you never met before, but there's something about them that's familiar. No. More than that. It's like you've known them your whole life. It's like they know things about you and you know things about them. But nobody ever told you anything. It's just somebody you know. So maybe you meet this person. You introduce yourselves. Maybe there's no one else around and you just meet this person in private or something. Like on an airplane or something. And you get to talking. And all of a sudden you're telling this person all sorts of things you'd never tell anyone you know. In your real life I mean. You're spilling it all out. Maybe you did things. Maybe you hurt somebody. Maybe you hurt yourself. Whatever. And you're telling this complete and total stranger all about it because this is somewhere else. This is your airplane life. This is not real. It doesn't matter. This plane is going to land. You will shake hands. Go your separate ways. So you let them into you. You put it all out there. Maybe it felt good. I don't know. You don't know. You don't know why you said the things you said. There was just something about them that made you feel it was all right. You talked. Maybe they talked too. You get off that plane. They get off. You put on your real world coat. You get on the real world escalator. You feel a little lighter. You smile to yourself. You got to make a phone call or something. Everything's fine and good. But then it happens. You see them in baggage claim. And it's different. You're not the same. Neither are they. "It" is not the same. In fact, it doesn't feel good at all. Something changed. It shifted. Their eyes don't come to yours in the same way. There's distance. You realize this person knows you inside. And they're gonna go out there. God knows what they're going to do with it. You want it all back. You can't get it back. They shoot you a little smile as they disappear into the crowd. And you're thinking. What kind of smile was that?

*(Fade to Black.)*

*(Lights up on QUIET, an older man. He sits in an airplane seat. He is dressed to travel. He is wearing his seatbelt.)*

*(Nearby, but on the other side of the stage, is ODETTA. She is sitting backwards on a wooden chair. She wears a simple house dress. Her feet are bare.)*

QUIET

ODETTA

They never built here  
The ground isn't good  
It's wet and loose  
It moves  
The river's always sucking at it  
Always taking a part of it back  
There's nothing it can't take back

I watch at night  
Waiting for the floods  
Waiting for the edge to slip  
Calm and quiet up the bank  
In the dark  
In the dark  
Closer  
To touch the foundation  
It suckles the bricks  
That's why the floor is uneven  
It buckles  
Gets tender in places  
What you smell is the rot in the wood  
  
It doesn't feel anything for you  
It doesn't love anything

I opened my eyes  
There was nothing but stars  
And the sound of the river  
Talking to me  
And the stars  
And the smell  
of burnt plastic and leaves  
and something like food

in the darkness  
I saw a water snake push his head through

A river doesn't feel  
A river just remembers everything you ever  
forgot  
A river just waits  
Knowing you inside and out  
Calling for you to drink it in

Sometimes  
when the sun rises  
I watch it walk back to its banks  
I follow it one step at a time  
My feet an inch from the edge  
I got little girl feet  
Mud bubbles up between my toes

I look into it  
Trying to see its heart  
I tell it in a whisper that I am still  
here  
River says nothing  
It just makes a bleeding sound  
And reflects

the sky  
he blurred Orion's face  
rippled Cassiopeia  
and I knew I was not looking up  
but down  
in the river  
there was blood  
in the river  
And bodies  
in the river  
and I knew them

Mud bubbles up between my toes

and the river said  
where is your lover?  
And I didn't know  
And the river said  
Where is your shirt?  
And I didn't know  
And the river said  
Where is your child?  
And I didn't know  
And the river said  
where is the pilot?  
and I said I thought he was probably with  
the plane

I got little girl feet  
Do you see  
I got the feet of a little girl

It was my hand

My hand was moving

I was pleased

I felt clean

My hand was moving on the page

Leaving symbols

Making sense

From thirty thousand feet

The whole world is geometry

The secret ecstasy of science is

Discovery

I have the answer

I have a part of the answer

I have the beginning of a part of the answer  
to the question I never asked

I've always had a way with numbers

Everything about me

Feels brand new today

I have come to the conclusion

That waiting

Is the very worst state of being

Sometimes

When the fog dissolves

I can see the opposite bank

I raise my hand sometimes

I wave at them

Once

A small girl even saw me

I know she did

*(He begins to write an equation on the window. It is difficult. Slow. His hand trembles.)*

The end is the origin

The origin the end

*(He drops the pastel. He picks it up.)*

Yes.

*(He writes. Drops it again. He rubs his hand.)*

Wait

Wait she said

Something is wrong

what is wrong

wait

wait

*(He sits.)*

I was writing

I was...

Writing

She held up a finger

As if to say

I exist

I did this with my hand

I did this

As if to say

So do I

On that side of the river

There is no waiting

Not even at bus stops

Even at bus stops there is something to see

There is someone to look into

There are birds to consider

Where there are birds there is no waiting

Bird is the opposite of wait

The wait is here

The air has weight

And the mud has weight

And the waiting weighs on a girl like me

On a napkin  
On the tray  
On the way  
To Boston  
We were over New Jersey  
When I solved it  
I almost solved it  
I nearly...

I was drinking the best seven-up in the  
entire universe

I hold the napkin up  
To the stewardess  
I said  
I say  
“Do you see?”  
She just smiles  
Asks me not to be difficult  
Because the movie is starting  
And Alec Baldwin’s in it

Pushes down until  
I’m hip deep in the wet

I’ve been waiting for you  
Aching for the sound of a bird  
Of anything other than...  
I breathe  
I hear tides  
I used to do this  
*(She places her hands over her ears.)*  
I heard the rush of my blood  
The current though my eardrums  
That how I knew  
Somehow  
You got in my ears

Do you see

Do you see

It's here

All your ideas

I say

Einstein, Yes?

I say quantum

She doesn't

She just

You just

She just

It's things like stewardesses

Flight attendants

Yes

Flight attendants

remind me

That I've never known what people say to  
each other

I want to tell her this

I want to tell her

All your ideas

Of space

And Light

And time

These were lies

Before

Headphones are two dollars

Sir, you'll have to close your window

Please sir

Flight attendant

Sir

Sir, the other passengers would appreciate

Sir



After

Then

Now

Here

There

Prepositions are myths

Near

Far

Sir

The shape of your mouth when you say

Come

Come go

Come go

These are myths

I can show you

I can show you here

I can show you

On a napkin

You'll have to close your window

I can show you through a window

What you see

Sir

What you see

Is

Sir

A star

eighty

seven

thousand

million

million

million  
miles away

What you see  
Is a light  
Alive  
Spinning  
Beautiful and alone  
Like you

What you see  
Is your reflection  
The elements  
of your flesh  
The heat  
in your breath  
The rhythm  
of your heart  
You are  
The stuff of stars

You see  
Order  
Perfection  
Unity

What you see  
Is the void  
Darkness  
Death  
Cold and empty

What you see  
Is the void  
Expanding  
beyond your mind

Larger than your concept  
Older than the history of water and rock  
Older than your God

What you see  
is the void  
The region of your sleep  
Your origin and your end

Truth

Your life wrapped loose in the womb of  
paradox death

Gravity is the only law

What you see  
is the void

The law of souls

So much dark

all things

It has weight

revolving

Particles spinning

in Fission

It has weight

Fusing

Colliding

Embedding

Like lovers

Death in birth

Birth in Death

What you see

Is a star

eighty

seven

million

million

million

Miles away

What you see

Is a memory

of light

of time

of a world

Now dead

It haunts us and pulls us close

I could show you on napkins

I say

Through windows

If you had the time

Stewardesses don't have time for quantum  
physics

Or physicists

I was about to tell her I was someone  
important

Like Einstein I said

Galileo

I was about to tell her that they study me in  
colleges

They have me in their books I said

She said...

And walked towards the cockpit

From the way she held her head

I knew something was very wrong

What you see

Is the void

Darkness

Death

Cold and empty

It haunts us and pulls us close

Excuse me please

Excuse me

Wait

***VOICE***