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Dramatic Publishing



Tracks



Drama by Peter Tarsi

Tracks

Drama. By Peter Tarsi. Cast: 4m., 6w. A group of strangers meet in a dirty subway station. They have arrived with limited personal belongings, their watches have stopped, and they all claim to be in different cities. Soon they learn there is no way out of the station, and the unfortunate truth is told to them: they are all dead. Since subway stations have two sides, they reason the train leaving from one platform must be bound for Heaven, while the train leaving from the other platform must be bound for Hell. But which platform are they on? They reflect upon their lives, recalling and confessing past deeds of which they are not proud, hoping to figure out which platform is which. The arrival of someone from the other platform only complicates matters, and the answer remains unclear. As the subway train finally approaches, they must decide whether to stay and ponder their actions further, or to have faith and climb aboard to their final destination. *One int. set. Approximate running time: 40 minutes. Code: TH4.*

Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel

ISBN-10 1-58342-410-5
ISBN-13 978-1-58342-410-0



Dramatic Publishing

311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
ph: 800-448-7469



Printed on recycled paper

www.dramaticpublishing.com

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TRACKS

By
PETER TARSI



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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ISBN: 978-1-58342-410-0

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Tracks was first presented on March 2, 2006, at the Robert H. Bray Auditorium at Attleboro High School in Attleboro, Massachusetts, under the direction of the author. The cast was as follows:

THE HOMELESS GIRL Lauren Bambera
THE OLD MAN Kyle Eames
THE LAWYER Allison Girczyc
THE PROFESSOR Troy Pepicelli
THE NUN. Karina Villa-Duran
THE BUSINESSWOMAN Brittany Fiske
THE BUSINESSMAN Jeff Grenier
THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRL Veronica Tumavicus
THE HIGH SCHOOL BOY Chris Michaud
THE WAITRESS Angela Kelley

Stage Management by Katelyn Schoonmaker
Set Design by Mandie Provost
Lighting by Lindsey Levesque
Sound Operation by. Alan Friedlander

Understudies Vanessa Blanchette & Aleia Morin

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CHARACTERS

THE HOMELESS GIRL – about 20 years old, afraid and unsure of herself. After running away from home, she has been staying in the subway station for almost three years. She tries to tune out the conversations of others in the station, but can't help contributing. This results in increased frustration and insecurity. She is trapped in a vicious cycle.

THE OLD MAN – a tired man, in his early 80s. He is a Korean War veteran who walks with a limp from a war injury. After living a long, decent life, he has been battling cancer. Despite everything that has occurred, he has very little regrets and is willing to accept his destiny.

THE LAWYER – a single, driven prosecuting attorney in her late 30s. She has dedicated her life and career to the pursuit of justice, but in doing so is unable to look at others without criticizing their faults. This high standard she has for others is still below the standard she holds for herself. She assumes total responsibility for every case she has lost.

THE PROFESSOR – a confident, friendly professor of literature in his early 50s. His charming demeanor has made him quite popular with his students. Thus, he is extremely devoted to his job, perhaps at the expense of his wife and his son, who is almost done with college.

THE NUN – after being a self-proclaimed “hooligan” in Catholic school, she devoted the next fifty years of her life to her faith, which has gotten her through all difficulties in her life. Though she does not wish to force her faith upon others, she

is always willing to offer a helping hand to those who may have lost their way.

THE BUSINESSWOMAN – a married woman in her mid-30s, with two young children at home with her husband. She reluctantly returned to a career after her husband was laid off from work. Though she understands the responsibility of providing for her family, she feels guilty about all the time spent away from them.

THE BUSINESSMAN – a married man in his mid-40s, with two teenaged daughters. He works at a mid-level job for an insurance company and struggles to make ends meet. Always worried about how he is perceived, not only by his employers but by everyone else, he often comes across as nervous, anxious, guilty or even paranoid.

THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRL – a senior in high school, ranked near the top of her class. Very smart, with a level head on her shoulders, she will be headed to college soon, and cannot wait for the opportunity to escape from her hometown. Though she wants to move on, she is afraid how it will impact her boyfriend.

THE HIGH SCHOOL BOY – her boyfriend, also a senior in the same high school. He is not ranked near the top of his class, and if further education is in his future, it will be at a local community college at best. He procrastinates and clings too much to his girlfriend.

THE WAITRESS – a woman in her late 30s from “the wrong side of the tracks.” She has lived a hard life, her deadbeat husband having left her. She has been forced to take a string of jobs to keep herself and her daughter afloat. She tries to live her life as calmly and honestly as possible but has occasionally released a gesture of thoughtlessness.

NOTE: See Properties List at end of play.

PROPERTIES LIST

In the world of this play, everyone arrives in the subway station afterlife with a physical representation of the thing for which they were most guilty in their lives. Thus, it is imperative that the following props be present and assigned to the appropriate characters. All other props should be kept to an absolute minimum.

HOMELESS GIRL: Cigarette

OLD MAN: Cane

LAWYER: Briefcase with one legal-sized folder

PROFESSOR: Wedding band

NUN: Rosary beads

BUSINESSWOMAN: Cell phone

BUSINESSMAN: Wallet with ATM receipt

HIGH SCHOOL GIRL: Varsity jacket

HIGH SCHOOL BOY: Car keys (inside jacket pocket)

WAITRESS: Order pad & pen

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(The play opens with the sound of a subway train leaving the station. Ideally, the sound comes only from stage right. The stage is awash with red light as a strobe light flickers. The frequency of the strobe decreases as the sound effect softens—i.e., the train is getting farther away. Simultaneously, the remainder of the stage lights slowly rise to reveal a dirty, run-down subway station.

The D edge of the stage serves as the edge of the subway platform. Across the length of the stage is a wall. Center stage are two stairways leading upward out of the station. Only the bottom few steps of each staircase are in view, the rest masked by another wall, DC of the main wall. There are three benches: A short (6' or so) bench in front of the C wall, and two (8' to 10') benches on either side of the stairs, creating a completely symmetric space. Symmetry is broken, however, by what is on the walls. Subway maps, torn advertisements and graffiti may appear on the walls, but must not give any specific locations. The station either should not be named or any name should be sufficiently obscured.

The lights have come up to reveal two figures on stage. One is a young woman, the HOMELESS GIRL, some-

what anxious yet lethargic, standing DR. She has been waiting in the station for a long time, unsure of herself. She holds an unlit cigarette that she has debated whether or not she will smoke. She wears dirty, torn clothes covered by a dirty, torn, unkempt coat. Her hair may be somewhat disheveled.

Lying down on the L bench is an OLD MAN, who is sound asleep. He is clearly a senior citizen. He is dressed in a hospital gown or bathrobe, but this is difficult to see since his body is blanketed by newspapers. However, it is clear to see his stockinged feet are shoeless and a cane is within his reach.

Before the sound effect fully fades, a professionally dressed female LAWYER rushes down the L stairs trying to catch the train. She realizes, much to her dismay, that she has missed it. She turns toward OLD MAN, turns away in subtle displeasure, glances and then glares at HOMELESS GIRL, looks at her watch and resigns herself to sit on the C bench. She sits facing R, laying her briefcase on the bench beside her. She opens the case and oddly stares at its contents—only a single legal-sized file folder. Shaking the oddness off, she removes the folder from the case and studies the papers inside.

Next, the PROFESSOR, smartly dressed in a shirt, tie and sweater vest, comes down the R stairs. He sees the HOMELESS GIRL and confidently approaches her. She glances at him and he gives her a quick smile. She nervously paces away, fiddling with her cigarette. The PROFESSOR sees this, reaches inside his jacket pocket

to find his lighter and steps over to her. All the while, LAWYER has been observing.)

PROFESSOR. Would you like a light? (*Still searching for his lighter but unable to find it.*)

HOMELESS GIRL (*startled*). Wha...?

PROFESSOR. I have a lighter somewhere. For your cigarette.

HOMELESS GIRL. Oh, this. (*Looks at cigarette.*) Uh...no.

LAWYER (*has been slowly rising, but speaks overlapping HOMELESS GIRL's "no"*). With all due respect, I have no interest in breathing any second-hand smoke. Besides, I believe state law prohibits smoking on train and subway platforms.

(HOMELESS GIRL steps away. By this time, a NUN has descended the L staircase. She wears a typical black and white nun outfit, complete with habit. Upon seeing OLD MAN, she holds her rosary beads over him and prays. She must be finished praying before HOMELESS GIRL announces that the cigarette is her last.)

PROFESSOR (*to LAWYER*). Let me guess. A lawyer.

LAWYER (*rolls her eyes*). Yes. A good one too, so I recommend you not violate state law in front of me.

PROFESSOR. The lady doth protest too much, methinks. (*Only he himself chuckles.*)

HOMELESS GIRL. Lay off it. I didn't want a light, okay? I don't want to smoke it. I'm...I'm saving it. It's my last one.

NUN (*has finished praying and stepped D*). My apologies, but I couldn't help overhearing. (*Steps toward HOME-*

LESS GIRL.) You're saving your last cigarette? May I assume you're quitting the habit?

HOMELESS GIRL (*after a quiet, yet somewhat all-knowing, groan*). I guess you could say that.

NUN. Congratulations, and have faith, dearie. I will pray for your success.

OLD MAN (*unexpectedly opens his eyes and speaks without sitting up*). Yeah, those things'll kill ya! (*Laughs, but it trails off as he passes out again.*)

(The others all looked in OLD MAN's direction when he spoke, but then looked at each other uncomfortably. The awkward silence is broken by a voice coming down the R stairs—a BUSINESSWOMAN speaking on her cell phone. She is dressed in a business suit and pants ensemble.)

BUSINESSWOMAN. ...running late again, so just tuck the kids in and kiss them good night for me. And please make their lunches for school tomorrow. I'll be leaving early tomorrow for a presentation to a client. Stephanie likes her sandwiches cut into triangles, but I'm sure you already know that, honey. (*There is no answer on the other end.*) Honey? (*Looks at display on phone.*) Damn. No signal down here.

(She looks around for help. The others, with the exception of OLD MAN and HOMELESS GIRL, quickly look away from her so as not to appear to have been listening. Upon the line "no signal down here," HOMELESS GIRL is shaking her head and sadly grimacing as if she knows something the others don't. After fiddling with

her phone, holding it aloft, and stepping to slightly different locations in order to try to find a place with some signal, BUSINESSWOMAN gives up on her phone. She examines the others and approaches LAWYER.)

BUSINESSWOMAN. Excuse me. Do you by any chance have a cell phone I could use for a few moments?

LAWYER. I usually get reception in the subway. Hold on.

(LAWYER puts down her folder and searches through her case for her phone. PROFESSOR smiles at BUSINESSWOMAN when she looks at him, so he searches through his pockets, but can't find his.)

BUSINESSWOMAN *(sitting beside LAWYER)*. I'm not exactly sure when mine went dead, so I don't know how much of the message my husband got, and... *(Sees a puzzled look on LAWYER's face.)* Any luck?

LAWYER. That's odd. I can't seem to find it. *(Continues searching to no avail.)*

PROFESSOR *(approaches BUSINESSWOMAN)*. I usually keep mine in my coat pocket, but oddly, I don't seem to be wearing my coat. Sorry.

BUSINESSWOMAN. I just want him to tell my kids I love them, and that I'm sorry I missed tucking them in again.

NUN. Children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. How many children do you have, dearie?

BUSINESSWOMAN. Two.

NUN. I'm sure he'll tell them for you.

BUSINESSWOMAN (*rising, addressing everyone*). Did anyone happen to see a payphone anywhere in the station?

(With the exception of HOMELESS GIRL and OLD MAN, the others provide indefinite answers. HOMELESS GIRL again reacts oddly—she shivers and groans.)

HOMELESS GIRL. Payphone down here? Yeah, right.
(Puts cigarette to her lips nervously.)

BUSINESSWOMAN. What about upstairs?

NUN. Dearie, don't worry about it. It sounds like your husband is an expert at this kind of thing.

BUSINESSWOMAN. He is, he is. I just wanted the kids to hear me say good night on the machine before bed.

OLD MAN (*like before*). That would be a long-distance call. *(Passes out like before.)*

(Again, the others look awkwardly at OLD MAN. PROFESSOR takes a few steps toward him.)

BUSINESSWOMAN. Maybe I'll get home in time to see them. Ben had a Little League game tonight. My husband sometimes takes them out for ice cream afterward. Maybe Stephanie won't fall asleep in the car. Does anyone know when the next train comes?

(HOMELESS GIRL turns away from them, looking up to the ceiling, puffing quickly on her unlit cigarette. She wants to tell them something but is aware it's better that

they learn it themselves. LAWYER and PROFESSOR both look at their watches.)

LAWYER. Should be any minute. I just missed a train when I got here, and that was... *(Trails off, looking at watch.)* My watch has stopped.

PROFESSOR. Mine too.

BUSINESSWOMAN. It's all right. I'll go upstairs and look for a payphone.

(She starts toward the R stairs but backs away as a BUSINESSMAN rushes down the stairs, almost plowing through her. He wears a coat over his shirt and tie. He is gasping for breath and clutching his wallet to his chest. He almost stumbles into BUSINESSWOMAN.)

BUSINESSWOMAN. Oh!

(BUSINESSWOMAN quickly steps out of the way as BUSINESSMAN staggers to the C bench. LAWYER collects her belongings, not so much to clear a place for the man, but to preserve her important work. Slowly, the NUN approaches BUSINESSMAN.)

BUSINESSMAN *(still panting)*. I think I lost him.

NUN. Don't talk, son. Catch your breath.

(PROFESSOR looks up the stairs to see if anyone is coming.)

PROFESSOR. I don't see anyone coming.

BUSINESSMAN. Good. (*Puts his wallet in his inside coat pocket.*) When's the next train?

PROFESSOR. It should be soon.

LAWYER. Were you running from someone?

BUSINESSMAN. I was at an ATM when some guy pulled a knife on me. He told me to give him my money, but I took off. I cut through Central Park and came down here.

BUSINESSWOMAN. Central Park?

LAWYER. Central Park—as in New York City?

(With the exception of HOMELESS GIRL and OLD MAN, everyone slowly steps away from BUSINESSMAN. What he is saying does not make sense to them. They look around concerned and confused. They know they are not in New York City.)

LAWYER. That's not possible.

BUSINESSMAN. What? Why not?

LAWYER. Because we're in Chicago.

BUSINESSMAN. Chicago? Now that's not possible. This is New York.

BUSINESSWOMAN. But...but it's Seattle. How...?

PROFESSOR. California. I teach English and European Literature at U.C. Berkeley. (*Turns to NUN.*) And where do you think we are?

NUN. The other sisters and I were vacationing in Rome. I've wanted to go there all my life. I was sitting in my room reading up on the cathedrals we were going to see tomorrow. I...I believe I dozed off.

BUSINESSWOMAN. This doesn't make sense. I was walking to the bus stop, talking on my cell phone.

Maybe I wasn't paying close enough attention to where I was going, but I am positive I never entered a subway station.

OLD MAN. Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

PROFESSOR (*goes to OLD MAN*). If you have something to contribute to this conversation, then please do so.

OLD MAN (*swings his legs and sits up, revealing his attire to a shocked audience*). Are you sure you want my contribution?

LAWYER. You were here when I arrived. You must know where we are.

OLD MAN (*reaches for his cane and starts walking forward*). Where we are? We're in a subway station that happens to connect to several different places, including a hospital in Jacksonville, Florida. (*Points at himself*.) Don't you think that's odd?

BUSINESSWOMAN. This is ridiculous. It must be a dream or something.

BUSINESSMAN. I'm not dreaming. I ran across Central Park. I know that for a fact.

OLD MAN. Oh, that's right. (*Limps over to BUSINESSMAN*.) You escaped a mugging. Have you checked your wallet?

BUSINESSMAN. My wallet? What's that got to do...?

OLD MAN. Look in your wallet, sonny.

BUSINESSMAN (*gets and opens his wallet. Inside is no cash or credit cards, only an ATM receipt, which he holds up*). All my money...gone? What? How?

OLD MAN. Maybe you didn't get away. Consider that.

BUSINESSMAN. So what does that mean?

NUN (*to OLD MAN*). The poor man has been robbed.
Show some compassion.

LAWYER. It still doesn't answer where we are, or how we
all could've gotten here!

BUSINESSMAN (*stuffs the ATM receipt in his pocket*).
The only way he could have taken my money is if...is if
he stabbed me. (*Shrugs the idea off.*) So how does that
work? Did he stab me? Then what am I—dead?

*(There is a disturbing silence as they all look around,
contemplating the moments before they arrived in the
station. Meanwhile, HOMELESS GIRL has been wres-
tling with her conscience since the OLD MAN started
speaking to BUSINESSMAN—she has fiddled more anx-
iously with her cigarette than before. She puts it in her
mouth, but removes it to speak, keeping her back to the
others.)*

HOMELESS GIRL. We're all dead.

LAWYER. That can't be true. I think I'd remember if I
just died.

BUSINESSMAN. After you die, you go to a subway sta-
tion? That's ridiculous.

NUN. They do say the Lord works in mysterious ways.

BUSINESSWOMAN. This is crazy. Whatever this place is,
I have to get home to my family and away from you
people. I'm going to find a phone—even if I have to go
back up to the street—and call my husband. (*Has al-
ready vanished up the R stairs.*)

HOMELESS GIRL. You won't find one. (*But BUSINESS-
WOMAN has gone.*)