

*When We
Were Briefly
Strangers:
Three plays*

Sarah Friedberg

**When We Were Briefly
Strangers: Three Plays**

Sarah Friedberg

Copyright © Sarah Friedberg, 2025

All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

PREFACE	1
THE FISH ON MY FOOT	3
THE END OF ONCE	27
THEY DON'T SEE YOUR HURT	52

PREFACE

Dear Stranger,

It was a particularly cold evening. I tried to feel winter's fleeting sun, but I couldn't. Its warmth left too soon...shame, I wasn't done loving it. I was sitting in the park, on the swings. I go there when I feel my ageing. I like to pretend that being here will make me a child again: I crave their world of loud, beautiful color.

I was swinging alone. Then a little girl, no older than six, came up to me and sat in the swing next to mine. She wore a big red coat, had a maroon bow in her hair, and asked if I wanted to see how high she could fly.

"I'm going to fly like a unicorn," she stated, with her childhood hope. The kind that doesn't waver in the cold.

"Really?" I said.

She didn't respond to me. She just kicked her feet until she got tired of flying. Then she stood up and waved goodbye, as she left to the slides. The world magically glittered like it used to. I smiled.

The conversation wasn't long. We barely spoke, separated by our ages. But still, for a brief moment I felt like a child again. So, I kicked my feet until I, too, flew. My jaded, fragile wonder filled me until I was a unicorn soaring.

The little girl was a stranger. We will never see each other again. But she helped me become someone credulous. Now I can believe.

Moments with people who aren't like us, help us grow. I think that sharing something special with strangers is beautiful and important because they can subconsciously help us discover whatever it is we need.

This book offers three mini-plays about interactions between people who differ from each other. The plays tap into our natural inclination to learn from one another.

I know you'll understand the feeling, Stranger.

~ Sarah Friedberg

THE FISH ON MY FOOT

The lights come up. The setting is dark, like it's about to storm. It is dusk. OLD MAN is discovered on stage sitting on a bench. GIRL walks in after a beat.

GIRL is in her early twenties and seems to be in a rush.

OLD MAN: Change. Change please—

GIRL: No—

OLD MAN: Any change for me? A poor old man?

GIRL: Sorry—

OLD MAN: Please. Please, Girl any—

GIRL: No, I don't—

OLD MAN: Please—

GIRL: Just stay away.

(GIRL moves to pass him)

OLD MAN: You are afraid.

(GIRL freezes)

GIRL: What?

OLD MAN: You heard me.

GIRL: You don't know me.

OLD MAN: Correct. What are you afraid of?

GIRL: I'm not scared of you.

OLD MAN: That is not what I said. I said, "What are you afraid of?"

GIRL: I'm not afraid.

OLD MAN: Hah. Well, you're not a very good liar. If you're going to lie, you should be good at it. Otherwise, it's a waste of time, no?

GIRL: I'm not lying—

OLD MAN: I ask again. Why are you so afraid? Hmm?

GIRL: I'm not afraid.

OLD MAN: Oh, You're wasting our time—

GIRL: You don't know me.

OLD MAN: I thought we knew that already.

GIRL: You don't . . . how could you know I'm afraid? How do you know anything? You're just a stupid old man—

OLD MAN: Oh, Girl, do you smell that?

GIRL: What—

OLD MAN: I smell a fish.

GIRL: Well, yeah, we're next to the ocean.

OLD MAN: No . . . no I see a fish.

GIRL: There's nothing—

OLD MAN: Girl, there is something on you.

GIRL: What?

OLD MAN: A fish . . . it's tied to your foot. You're dragging it—

GIRL: That's disgusting—

OLD MAN: Exactly. It's rotting. Oh it's so stinky. See, my mother used to say, "Don't tie the fish to your foot, it'll rot up the play."

GIRL: Holy . . . you're crazy, you are—

OLD MAN: You are holding something in. I smell it.

GIRL: What are you talking about. You're crazy.

OLD MAN: Ah . . . so you do speak the truth.

GIRL: If you don't let me go I'll . . . I'll call the police.

OLD MAN: I'm not keeping you here. Look, there is the path.
You can leave with your fish. Go be afraid . . . or . . . stay.

(GIRL stays silence for a moment contemplating. She doesn't respond, but doesn't move away either)

OLD MAN: What is your fish, hmh?

GIRL: I don't understand.

OLD MAN: Yes, you do.

GIRL: NO, I don't. I don't have a fish. I hate fish, I hate sushi—

OLD MAN: Then why are you holding on?

GIRL: What?

OLD MAN: Your fish is rotting, and you are keeping it. Do not keep things that spoil. Let it go.

GIRL: I . . . I don't . . . you're just a crazy old man.

OLD MAN: You are not made to hold creatures that live in salt water. It will make you bitter.

GIRL: What?

OLD MAN: It will make you bitter.

GIRL: You don't make sense—

OLD MAN: The ocean. Oh . . . don't you love the ocean? It's beautiful, no?

GIRL: Yes.

OLD MAN: What do you find beautiful?

GIRL: Why should I tell you?

OLD MAN: Maybe you shouldn't. Maybe you should go back to rotting. Go . . . go . . . Leave . . . have fun with your fish.

(GIRL pauses for a moment, then sits next to him on the bench.)

GIRL: The sky.

OLD MAN: What do you mean, sky?

GIRL: It's what I find beautiful.

OLD MAN: The sky. Why?

GIRL: I don't know.

OLD MAN: Yes, you do.

(GIRL doesn't reply)

OLD MAN: Lying will only waste our time—

GIRL: I lost someone who's now up there.

OLD MAN: They are a bird?

GIRL: I don't know. Maybe. I . . . I don't know. But I tell myself they're in the sky.

OLD MAN: Hmm . . . well . . . don't we all have someone in sky.

GIRL: Yeah, whatever.

OLD MAN: Why are you mad.

GIRL: I'm not.

OLD MAN: Yes you are.

GIRL: No, I'm not.

OLD MAN: You're not a good liar—

GIRL: I'm leaving.

(GIRL stands)

OLD MAN: What is it you want?

GIRL: I don't want anything.

OLD MAN: Maybe, maybe not.

GIRL: Why do you always talk so cryptic?

OLD MAN: What is this . . . cryptic?

GIRL: Never mind. What?

OLD MAN: What?

GIRL: You're the one staring at me—

OLD MAN: I'm not—

GIRL: Do you have something else to say?

OLD MAN: Do you want sympathy?

GIRL: What?

OLD MAN: Sympathy. Do you want me to acknowledge your loss? Your person in the sky?

GIRL: No. Why . . . why would I want that?

OLD MAN: Keep wasting time, Girl.

(OLD MAN rises, and starts to move away)

GIRL: I'm not...fine...fine...I want your sympathy. Is that what you want to hear?

(OLD MAN moves to sit down again)

OLD MAN: Yes. I like the truth. Don't you?

(GIRL doesn't reply)

OLD MAN: It is okay to need other people's help. Sometimes all we need is a hug.

GIRL: A hug?

OLD MAN: Yes. It is nice when other people see our hurt.
Acknowledgement fills the heart like . . . like a little bunny . . .
oh . . . so soft they are...and fluffy like a marshmallow.

GIRL: You're crazy.

OLD MAN: Hah. Are you cold?

GIRL: What...you're so random.

OLD MAN: I'm not random. You are cold.

GIRL: It's probably the wind or something—

OLD MAN: Or something. It wasn't the wind. It's the fish . . .
eh . . . rotting . . . stealing the happiness.

GIRL: An imaginary fish isn't stealing my happiness.

OLD MAN: Okay.

GIRL: Okay?

OLD MAN: Yes, that is what you said.

GIRL: You're not gonna argue with me?

OLD MAN: Why?

GIRL: Why, what?

OLD MAN: Why should I bother? You're going to keep lying. I don't want to waste my time.

GIRL: Can you stop with that time thing It's so annoying!

OLD MAN: Hmh.

(OLD MAN turns away)

GIRL: Really? That's how we're doing this? Ignoring me is just petty.

(OLD MAN doesn't respond)

GIRL: Fine . . . fine . . . what do I do then? If . . . like . . . there's a fish . . . rotting inside me . . . and I'm . . . breathing in its rot and it's making me bitter. What do I do? How do I become happy . . . again? You know . . . like . . . stop the rot.

OLD MAN: Cut the tie.

GIRL: Well . . . as . . . um . . . as totally real as that sounds . . . is there another . . . like . . . actual thing I could do? Like therapy or like—

OLD MAN: Girl, I do not know.

GIRL: What?

OLD MAN: What?

GIRL: You don't know?

OLD MAN: Yes. That is what I said.

GIRL: What . . . you . . . you're supposed to have all the answers.

OLD MAN: Why?

GIRL: Cause you're . . . um . . . you have a long beard—

OLD MAN: Huh?

GIRL: How do I become happy?

(OLD man doesn't reply)

GIRL: Awe come on, how don't you know? You're like a hundred. Shouldn't you have all the answers by now? Aren't you happy?

OLD MAN: No. I haven't been happy for a long time.

GIRL: Why?

(OLD MAN doesn't reply. He looks forward in deep thought)

GIRL: Okay

(GIRL rises and leaves to exit)

OLD MAN: What color is the ocean?

(GIRL stops and turns to face time)

GIRL: What—

OLD MAN: Tell me please, Girl. I want to remember.

GIRL: Um . . . it's dark now. So, I guess it looks black.

OLD MAN: No. Look closely.

GIRL: I am.

OLD MAN: No. open your eyes, your heart, and see.

GIRL: I am, and I'm telling you there's nothing—

OLD MAN: Look, look and—

GIRL: I am, but it's too dark—

OLD MAN: It's never too dark to see.

GIRL: So that's like scientifically not true—

OLD MAN: No. One can always see.

(GIRL stares at him for a moment, then looks forward towards the ocean and sits down).

GIRL: Um . . . there . . . there's this bit of yellow too, in the water. It's almost orange. I . . . I think it's from a star maybe. Um . . . oh . . . I guess there's also blue. It's like the grey kind, though. But . . . there's this small streak of bright blue . . . like the blue you'd think the ocean would be. If that makes sense.

OLD MAN: Even in darkness, you can find color.

GIRL: Why'd you make me describe it?

OLD MAN: I had a daughter. One day, the waves were too big...they wanted her heart. Oh . . . they got their wish.

GIRL: I'm sorry.

OLD MAN: Yes.

GIRL: At least you can see the ocean. Like how I see the sky, you know?

OLD MAN: I do not know.

GIRL: Oh . . . well . . . when I miss my . . . um . . . I look up and tell myself she's here. I . . . I pretend to see her.

OLD MAN: That sounds very beautiful

GIRL: People called me crazy when I told them that.

OLD MAN: No. It is beautiful.

GIRL: Yeah. I guess it is.

(OLD MAN gets lost in thought again)

OLD MAN: I have eyes. But I cannot see.

GIRL: You're blind?

(OLD MAN gives a brief nod)

GIRL: Oh.

(GIRL look forward, to the ocean)

She's beautiful tonight. Your little girl.

OLD MAN: Yes, she always was. Who is in your sky?

GIRL: My sister.

OLD MAN: Ah, she is why you are so afraid.

GIRL: You don't realize how bright the world is . . . until you lose the person that was the light. I . . . I didn't know how dark this world could be.

OLD MAN: Yes. People do not know until they do not have it anymore. But darkness is only temporary. Color can always come back. Like now. Color came back to me when you saw my daughter. Saw color in the dark

GIRL: But . . . how . . . you . . . you'll never see the ocean again. You'll . . . you're blind . . . you'll never see your daughter again. Isn't that cruel?

OLD MAN: What's cruel is letting the fish rot. I had a fish, and it stank up my good. I was rotten, more than you, Girl.

GIRL: What'd you do?

OLD MAN: I let her back into the ocean.

GIRL: You let your fish back into the ocean . . . oh . . . you let . . . your daughter.

OLD MAN: We are not made to old on to dead fish. We can miss. We will always miss. But then we must cut the string. My little girl is in the ocean now. Free.

GIRL: But . . . you can't see the ocean anymore.

OLD MAN: I cannot see, but I can sense.

GIRL: I still think that cruel . . . I . . . the world's just cruel, you know?

OLD MAN: I don't think your cruel.

GIRL: I never said I was cruel.

OLD MAN: You said the world is cruel, and you are part of the world. This world is very beautiful if you take the time to believe in it.

GIRL: How do you know?

OLD MAN: What?

GIRL: How do you know it's beautiful?

OLD MAN: because you believed in me.

GIRL: No, I didn't.

OLD MAN: Yes. You saw my daughter for me. Your kindness helped me see my ocean.

(GIRL doesn't respond)

You told me what she looked like. I don't think that was very cruel. Sometime all we need is a little help, no?

(GIRL doesn't respond)

I let my daughter go, but I can still feel her. I see her. And you'll see your sister even if you cut the tie. You do not need to be afraid.

(OLD MAN rises and starts to walk away)

GIRL: But what if I can't . . . like . . . stop being afraid. What do I do?

OLD MAN: Cut the fish, Girl.

GIRL: It's gonna hurt?

OLD MAN: Yes. But let me ask you. Would your sister like to see you "rotting"?

GIRL: No—

OLD MAN: So, then you know what you need to do.

(GIRL rises and exits opposite from him)

OLD MAN: Girl.

GIRL: Yes.

OLD MAN: I am sorry about your sister.

(OLD MAN turns away)

GIRL: Were you able to say goodbye?

(OLD MAN stops walking)

To your daughter.

OLD MAN: No.

GIRL: Me neither. I'm sorry.

OLD MAN: Go be free.

GIRL: Okay.

(GIRL starts walking away)

OLD MAN: Girl.

GIRL: Yes.

OLD MAN: My ocean is beautiful?

GIRL: So beautiful.

(OLD MAN smiles and fully exits the stage. GIRL waits until he's fully of stage, then exits)

Lights fade out, focusing on the bench until it's a complete blackout.

THE END OF ONCE

SCENE ONE

KID (V.O) June.

J

FADE IN: Boy is standing up, facing downstage. He looks scared, like he's contemplating something. He moves backwards like he's about to charge. Before he runs, KID enters

KID: Hi.

BOY: Jesus . . . you—

(BOY turns around and notices KID)

scared me.

KID: Oh. Sorry.

BOY: Sure, you are.

KID: I'm happy today.

BOY: Ok. Go away.

(BOY sits)

KID: It's also sunny today.

BOY: Ok.

KID: I'm bored.

BOY: And how is that my problem?

KID: I don't know.

(KID relaxes)

BOY: Oh, by all means, make yourself comfortable—

KID: Ok!

BOY: No . . . that was sarcasm . . . just . . . go—

KID: Oh—

BOY: You shouldn't be talking to strangers. Get out.

KID: But I'm not in anywhere—

BOY: Oh—

KID: I can't “get out” if I'm not in anywhere—

BOY: For heaven's sake—

KID: You're old, shouldn't you know that?

BOY: I'm not old—

KID: You are—

BOY: Go away.

KID: I . . . I could just sit here. I'll be quiet.

BOY: Yeah, whatever.

(Silence)

KID: What're you doing?

BOY: You just said you'd—

KID: I know. But being quiet is boring. So . . . watcha doing?

BOY: (beat) I'm thinking, I'm ponder—

KID: I like ponds too. I had a goldfish, you know? Mama said I could get one 'cause I'm all big now. But Papa got mad at me once. He threw Goldie in the green pond near our house.

BOY: No, not pond, pondering. It means thinking.

KID: Why didn't you just say thinking?

BOY: Didn't want to.

KID: Were you trying to sound fancy?

BOY: No.

KID: Then why'd you use pondering?

BOY: You're odd.

KID: (*smiles*) No, I'm even. Hah, you smiled!

BOY: I didn't.

KID: Did too.

BOY: No.

KID: Yes.

BOY: No. *(beat)* Oh . . . look, I used the word because I felt like it. There wasn't a reason.

KID: There's always a reason for things.

BOY: Well, aren't you omniscient.

KID: Why do you always use big words?

BOY: You ask a lot of questions.

KID: Yeah.

BOY: Writers use words like pondering. I wanted to go to college for it.

KID: You wanna be a writer?

BOY: Yeah, I wanted to.

KID: You don't anymore?

BOY: No I . . . I do . . . I just thought that today I would . . . um . . . never mind. I . . . I'm gonna be a poet.

KID: So you're going away to college? When summer ends.

BOY: No . . . I don't think so.

KID: Oh. What's a poet?

BOY: Someone who...says meaningful things.

KID: Is that why you use big words?

BOY: Maybe.

KID: Are big words better?

BOY: I don't know.

KID: (beat) How come you were so close to the edge?

BOY: What?

KID: Earlier. You...you were running near the edge—

BOY: Leave me alone, Kid—

KID: You could die if you fall—

BOY: Go home—

KID: I can't go back.

BOY: Why? Go find your friends.

KID: I don't have any.

BOY: *(beat)* Bother someone else.

KID: You're not very nice.

BOY: I know.

KID: Why?

(BOY doesn't respond)

What do you ponder?

BOY: You want the truth?

KID: I think so.

BOY: Then ask me again.

KID: Ask you what?

BOY: The question.

KID: Oh. What do you ponder?

BOY: What the wind would feel like if I jumped.

KID: I also want to fly. I asked God to turn me into a bird. It hasn't worked yet. But that's okay! I'll just pray harder.

BOY: (beat) You have faith.

KID: What's faith, it sounds pretty.

BOY: It's believing you're gonna be a bird.

FADE OUT: Blackout

SCENE TWO

KID (V.O): July.

FADE IN: KID and BOY are sitting center stage

KID: I had a fish once, you know?

BOY: You already told me that.

KID: I did?

BOY: Yeah. Like last month.

KID: Did I tell you Papa set it free? Into the pretty green pond.

BOY: There's a pond near your house?

KID: Mhm!

BOY: What does it look like?

KID: Well, it was big and green, like bright bright green, and I visited it all the time before we became friends.

BOY: Why?

KID: Why what?

BOY: Why'd you visit a pond?

KID: That's where Goldie is.

BOY: Your fish?

KID: My friend.

BOY: Why you friends with a fish? It can't talk back.

KID: Well . . . I wanted someone to listen to me.

BOY: So, you sit and talk to a pond?

KID: No, I talked to my fish in the pond.

BOY: *(beat)* What'd you say it looked like, again?

KID: What, what, looks like?

BOY: The pond.

KID: Oh. Green and tall.

BOY: Tall?

KID: Yeah like . . . reallllly tall.

BOY: How's a pond tall?

KID: I don't know.

BOY: *(thinks)* Can we go see it?

KID: *(smiles)* Can we race?

BOY: Fine.

There is a blackout. BOY and KID walk in the dark to the down left, where a spotlight appears over them.

BOY: That's no pond.

KID: Papa said it was.

BOY: It's called a dumpster.

KID: Where does it go?

BOY: It doesn't lead anywhere.

KID: Why did Papa lie?

BOY: I don't know. Why'd you say it was pretty?

KID: It's green. I like green.

BOY: Is that your favorite color?

KID: No. Yellow is.

BOY: I hate yellow.

KID: Well, I love it. Cause everyone hates it.

BOY: Well . . . I mean . . . not everyone—

KID: Yes, they do. No one in school likes it.

BOY: Your school isn't the whole world.

KID: (*frustrated*) Well, it's really big.

BOY: It's just a color, you know?

KID: Then why does no one pick it?

BOY: Cause it's ugly.

KID: Why?

BOY: It just is.

KID: Does being ugly mean you don't deserve love?

BOY: No. That's a dumb question.

KID: I didn't know.

BOY: It's fine (*notices KID's expression*) . . . look, let's just—

KID: What about Goldie...wait no what about the weeds?

BOY: What about the them?

KID: Mama always has me kill 'em.

BOY: Well . . . they're bad.

KID: Do they kill anybody?

BOY: No but—

KID: Then why do we kill them?

BOY: *(beat)* 'Cause they're ugly.

KID: That doesn't seem fair.

BOY: *(Beat)* Yeah.

KID: What type of water is in a dumpster?

BOY: What?

KID: Goldie doesn't like saltwater. That's what the fisherman said.

BOY: Dumpsters don't have water.

KID: Papa said they do.

BOY: Your Papa lied.

KID: Don't fish need water?

BOY: Yeah.

KID: Where's my fish then? *(beat)* Oh. Why would Papa do that?

BOY: Adults ain't always nice.

KID: I want my fish.

BOY: He—

KID: She—

BOY: She's not coming back. I'm sorry.

Silence.

KID: Can we get my jump rope?

BOY: Yeah.

KID and BOY stand. KID holds BOY's hand

BOY: What're you doing?

KID: Holding your hand.

BOY: Why?

KID: Cause you're my friend.

BOY: Alright then.

FADE OUT: Blackout

SCENE THREE

KID (V.O): August.

FADE IN: KID and BOY are sitting center stage.

KID: The world is so green. Look, look up and see.

BOY: I see.

KID: No, you're always pondering, with that serious face.

BOY: Clever.

KID: You're gonna be a really good poet.

BOY: I don't always make a face-

KID: Yeah you—

BOY: I used to, though.

KID: What changed?

BOY: I don't know. You just . . . I don't know.

KID: What did I do?

BOY: I . . . I don't go near the edge anymore.

KID: Oh. Ok. Is that special?

BOY: When you're older, you'll get it.

KID: I hate it when people tell me that.

BOY: Why?

KID: *(beat)* Why do the leaves turn brown?

BOY: 'Cause the seasons have to pass.

KID: Why can't the leaves stay beautiful?

BOY: They're not meant to.

KID: That's stupid.

BOY: It's life.

KID: I'll miss 'em.

BOY: The leaves?

KID: Mhm.

BOY: They come back.

KID: What if they don't this time?

BOY: Then they don't.

KID: I don't like that.

BOY: Like what?

KID: Not knowing.

BOY: Yeah.

KID: Will you come back?

BOY: What's that supposed to mean?

KID: It's gonna be Fall. When the leaves go, the big kids do too.

BOY: I'm not a leaf kid.

KID: Good. I'd miss you. Can we watch the leaves?

BOY: You're gonna be bored –

KID: Look, a bird!

BOY: What a beauty.

KID: I hope it's loved.

BOY: Why wouldn't it be?

KID: Cause it's yellow.

BOY: Well, even if it's yellow, I'll love it.

KID: Really?

BOY: Yeah. Now come on, let's go jump rope instead.

KID rises and starts to skip towards the upper right sloppily

BOY: Hey kid?

KID stops and turns to BOY

KID: Yeah?

BOY: Um . . . I . . . I lied earlier. When I said I wasn't leaving.

KID: *(beat)* Why?

BOY: 'Cause I gotta go.

KID: Why?

BOY: I can't just jump rope all day.

KID: Why?

BOY: Because...that's not what adults do.

KID: I don't want you to be gone—

BOY: I'm not gone. I'm just leaving for a little while. But—

KID: But what—

BOY: Um . . . I had this English teacher who . . . he . . . well he hated me for a while. Then . . . I don't know . . . took a chance on me. Saw me. And made me apply for some scholarships back in December. I didn't hear back in June like I was supposed to. It's why I was depressed—

KID: Sad?

BOY: Yeah. Sad. But, then I got-

BOY pulls out a folded piece of paper.

I got this paper in the mail two weeks ago and . . . all I could do was stare at it cause . . . I . . . I'm going to college. And . . . I could be someone different, someone I want to be.

KID: I don't want you to go like Goldie.

BOY: I'm not a fish. I won't die tomorrow.

KID turns away from BOY, facing the audience.

KID: *(beat)* Isn't it all so pretty?

BOY: Yeah. I know.

KID: Can you tell the world?

BOY: *(To audience)* You are beautiful.

KID: Do you think the trees have friends?

BOY: Yeah.

KID: It's not very fun having no friends.

BOY: I'll always be your friend. Even if I'm not here.

BOY starts to rise. KID runs up to BOY and gives him a hug.

BOY: I . . . I'm sorry.

KID: It's okay.

KID steps away from BOY

Bye-bye.

BOY: Goodbye, Kid.

BOY then starts to exit upper right, before he completely exits, he turns back and looks at KID. When BOY completely leaves, KID looks out at the audience somberly. Then a spotlight goes up illuminating a BOY's acceptance letter. KID smiles at it and rises, and looks to where BOY exited. KID pauses for a moment, then exits the opposite side. Once KID exits, there is a slow fade into black, the light focusing on the acceptance letter.

FADE OUT: Blackout

THEY DON'T SEE YOUR HURT

FADE IN: *GIRL is sitting on a bench spitting on an old cloth to get a stain out of her dress.*

WOMAN enters distraught. She discovers the bench and demonstrates relief. There are indications that the scene is in the 1940s.

WOMAN: Oh, darling, you don't mind if I sit here?

GIRL: Oh...um—

WOMAN sits.

WOMAN: Fabulous! Now, would you mind telling no one that you saw me? Please?

GIRL: Oh . . . okay.

WOMAN: Yes, well, I'm in a bit of a...um...rebellious state. I suppose you could call it that. I'm really not supposed to be talking about it.

GIRL: Okay–

WOMAN: I'm running away from my husband. I'm leaving. It's
um . . . marvelous.

GIRL stays quiet.

WOMAN: You don't talk much. Do you?

GIRL: Nobody talks to me. I like to talk though. *(beat)* You're
really pretty.

WOMAN: Am I?

GIRL: You look like the movie girls Mama watches.

WOMAN: Well, aren't you a doll...sweet! I mean sweet.

Um...uh...I can assure you I'm not a movie star. I used to dream
of it, though, when I was a little girl. Oh...is today Wednesday?

GIRL: Yeah.

WOMAN: My...if I was still at home I'd be in my dance class now. I'd be there and not . . . oh . . . um . . . where are we exactly? I seemed to have forgotten where the bus dropped me off.

GIRL: My town. We're in the park.

WOMAN: Oh yes . . . um . . . how lovely.

GIRL: I guess.

WOMAN: Shouldn't you be in school?

GIRL: Yeah. I don't like school.

WOMAN: Nobody likes school.

GIRL: Then why do I have to go?

WOMAN: Cause...it's just what children do...you'd be . . . um . . . you'll stand out if you just stay home. Nobody will like you.

GIRL: Nobody already likes me.

WOMAN: Because you're not in school.

GIRL: No, it's because I'm broken.

WOMAN: Oh . . . sweetie...are you sure you should be telling me this? Why don't you find your mother, hmh?

GIRL: *(pause)* No.

WOMAN: Oh . . . alright then. Why do you think you're broken?

GIRL: School doesn't work on me.

WOMAN: Why?

GIRL: Cause, nothing stays in my brain.

WOMAN: Oh now don't be dramatic with me –

GIRL: I'm not, I swear—

WOMAN: Don't cuss. It's no good for a girl to talk that way.

GIRL: I'm sorry—

WOMAN: It's alright. It was only an accident.

GIRL: Thank you. (Pause) Are you smart?

WOMAN: My husband would say I couldn't tell a bird and a bug apart. But, if you ask me, I'd say I can hold my own.

GIRL: How? What do you mean?

WOMAN: I can do my maths.

GIRL: Could you help me?

WOMAN: You don't need my help.

GIRL: Please?

WOMAN: I'm not a teacher...it's not...um...I mean we're in public—

GIRL: Please?

WOMAN: Fine. What's seven times three?

GIRL: Twenty-one.

WOMAN: Five times ten?

GIRL: Fifty.

WOMAN: Three times three?

GIRL: Nine. Come on now, stop going easy on me.

WOMAN: I'm not.

GIRL: Yes, you are.

WOMAN: I'm not. Thirteen times three.

GIRL: Thirty-nine.

WOMAN: Wow. You're quite smart, you know?

GIRL: No.

WOMAN: You got everything right.

GIRL: I got lucky.

WOMAN: I think you're smart.

GIRL: You're no teacher. You don't know.

WOMAN: You just told me I was your teacher—

GIRL: Gimme more problems, please—

WOMAN: No. Look...Kid...you are smart. I promise.

GIRL: I don't believe you. Why don't I believe you?

WOMAN: I think that's something you need to figure out.

GIRL: Can you help me?

WOMAN: *(pause)* Why do you think that?

GIRL: Think what?

WOMAN: Why don't you believe you're smart?

GIRL: Cause, I'm ugly.

WOMAN: That doesn't mean you're not smart.

GIRL: Yes it does.

WOMAN: No it—

GIRL: I'm too ugly. That's what the teachers say. That I'm too ugly and I need to shut it. If I were smart, they wouldn't tell me that. If I were beautiful they wouldn't tell me that.

WOMAN: Don't listen to them.

GIRL: But they're adults.

WOMAN: Yeah, well, adults aren't always right . . . or nice.

GIRL: But they're old.

WOMAN: That doesn't mean anything. My husband was older, but how he treated me wasn't...um...it wasn't nice at all.

GIRL: Emily says you have to respect your elders.

WOMAN: Who's that?

GIRL: My mama.

WOMAN: Oh.

GIRL: She doesn't like it when I call her mama.

WOMAN: Do you want to?

GIRL: Want what?

WOMAN: To call her your mama.

GIRL: Yeah.

WOMAN: Well . . . your mother isn't here now. Why don't you call her . . . um . . . mama?

GIRL: Oh . . . um . . . okay. Could...could I call John papa too?

WOMAN: Who . . . oh . . . um . . . yes . . . yes of course.

GIRL: Mama, and Papa. I like that.

WOMAN: Good. Now, respecting adults doesn't mean they're right.

GIRL: Oh. I didn't know.

WOMAN: That's alright. Now you do.

GIRL: That's good.

WOMAN: It is.

GIRL: I can't wait till I'm old.

WOMAN: Why?

GIRL: Cause.

WOMAN: That's not an answer.

GIRL: I'll be respected.

WOMAN: Why's that important?

GIRL: Cause, then I can talk all I want.

WOMAN: You're allowed to do that now.

GIRL: No, I'm not.

WOMAN: Yes—

GIRL: They yell at me. I'd rather be quiet than yelled at. I don't like big voices, they're scary.

WOMAN: I guess they are.

GIRL: You don't realize that 'cause you're big . . .and pretty. You're real pretty, you know? Nobody does anything bad to pretty people. I wish I looked like you.

WOMAN: Are you scared of me?

GIRL: I'm scared of my Papa.

WOMAN: He . . . hurt you?

GIRL: His voice is a monster.

WOMAN: Is my voice a monster?

GIRL: No.

WOMAN: Are you scared of me?

GIRL: No.

WOMAN: If you ever are. I want you to hit me.

GIRL: Why?

WOMAN: ‘Cause.

GIRL: That’s no answer.

WOMAN: Promise me, Kid.

GIRL: Ok, I promise. Why?

WOMAN: Why what?

GIRL: Why’d you make me promise?

WOMAN: (*pause*) You’re already made of hurt—

GIRL: No, I’m not...I’m happy.

WOMAN: Then why do your eyes look so sad? A little girl shouldn’t be sad. They should be in school with their friends.

GIRL: I’m happy. (*pause*) I’ll be happy when I’m older.

WOMAN: Why?

GIRL: I'll be pretty. Mama says I'll grow out of my baby's face.
That means I'll be pretty . . . and . . . um . . . I'll smile a lot.
That's going to make me happy.

WOMAN: Yeah.

GIRL: Why did you leave your husband?

WOMAN: He . . . he's too much like my father. It . . .sickened me.
So, I left.

GIRL: I wish my Mama would leave my Papa.

WOMAN: Why?

GIRL: I think they'd be less rotten.

WOMAN: I'm sorry about your parents.

GIRL: I'm sorry about your husband.

WOMAN: You know, I also left because I want to see more.

GIRL: What are you gonna see?

WOMAN: The world.

GIRL: How big's the world?

WOMAN: So big. And I'm going to see it.

GIRL: Do you think I could, too?

WOMAN: If you believe.

GIRL: Ok. I'll believe.

WOMAN: Do you know if there's an inn around here?

GIRL: You're gonna stay?

WOMAN: I think I will...for a bit anyway.

GIRL stands.

GIRL: There's an inn a mile north of the church . . . oh but you actually would have to turn when you see the Richard's house . . . 'cause you should stay on the other side.

WOMAN: The other side?

GIRL: Yeah.

WOMAN: What's that?

GIRL: The white people's side. You . . . you shouldn't be here . . . with us . . . um . . .with me.

WOMAN: Why not?

GIRL: Because I'm black.

WOMAN: *(beat)* You're a girl.

GIRL: But—

WOMAN: You are a girl. That's all I see. And if I want to talk to you, and I want to talk to you, I will.

GIRL: Oh . . . well . . . um . . .

WOMAN: Come.

WOMAN stands.

Why don't we go to that inn a mile...um...north?

GIRL nods and starts to walk away. WOMAN grabs her hand and walks next to her.

GIRL: You're holding my hand.

WOMAN: I am.

GIRL: Why?

WOMAN: 'Cause I want to. We're friends, aren't we?

GIRL: Really? Will this make me pretty like you?

WOMAN: I think you're already beautiful.

GIRL smiles. As WOMAN and GIRL exit the stage, the lights dim until only the bench is illuminated. The light then focuses on the old cloth that GIRL was using in the beginning.

FADE OUT: Blackout

When We Were Briefly Strangers: Three Plays, collects three short plays that enact the impact of fleeting moments with strangers. The subtle connections that develop can linger, and profoundly change a life. This collection, which explores chance encounters, may awaken you to new, personal possibilities.

Sarah Friedberg is a student at the Portledge School in Locust Valley, NY. Her previous books include *Maybe at Dawn*, *When Light Touches Sky*, *Waiting for Dunno*, and *The Girl Who Wished Through the Mirror*. She studied creative writing at Dartmouth and acting at Stagedoor Manor in Loch Sheldrake, NY. *When We Were Briefly Strangers* is her first collection of plays.

Sarah Friedberg

