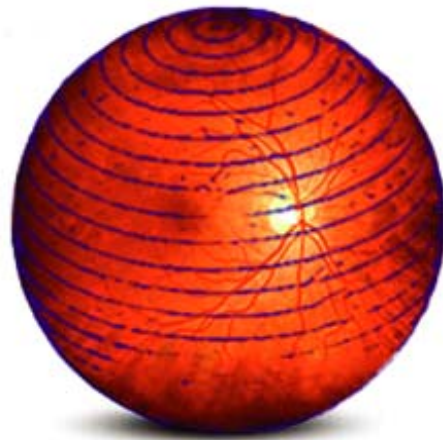


# **Anaerobic Respiration**

By Krista Knight



**CHARACTERS:**

Pegan: Aerobics Instructor. 28.

Russ: Pegan's brother. 30.

Kathy: Russ's internet fiancé. 34.

Mother: Pegan and Russ's mother. When she appears on stage, she is Pegan's memory of her mother when she was 9 years old.

Danny: Pegan's non-boyfriend.

**SETTING:**

An aerobics classroom, complete with exercise equipment: stair stepper, free weights, and rolled up mats. Underneath is a dirt floor.

In one corner is a door with opaque glass in the center and a metal vertical handle. One wall is a mirror.

The setting becomes dining room, grocery store, childhood landscape—but the exercise equipment is permanent.

Exercise music is prevalent throughout, especially when Pegan addresses "the class."

Note: Titles in bold can be announced.

The text spoken directly to Pegan's class is specified.

*Scene 1*  
*10 AM Low Impact*

*Exercise music comes up. Something like  
“Heading down the Highway.”  
Pegan alone on stage—full of anxious, sad  
energy.*

PEGAN

(To audience)  
My name is Pegan. I keep everything the same.

(To class)  
Ok, everybody, welcome to the beginning level, let's warm up. Be sure to plant your foot squarely on your step and look at your feet if you need to. Step is a godsend for me because I don't love aerobics, I mean nobody *loves* aerobics, it's a way to get your heart rate up, listen to music, lose some weight.

(To audience)  
I help people get their weight under control because I can't keep my life under control. I'm kidding. I'm in control.

(To class)  
And breathe! Try not to overextend.

*Sound of a **heartbeat**, drowns out the  
exercise music, and then fades.*

(To class)  
Especially you, in the front row. Breathe through your mouth and...

(To audience)  
The last thing I need is someone having a heart attack in my 10 am class. Or stroke. Every man in the last three generations on both sides of my family has had a stroke. Even Randolph, the German Sheppard, had a stroke. In fourth grade, my brother, Russ, and I dug a make-shift pool in the back yard with shovels we stole from Adam's hardware store.

ADAM (V.O.)

I'm going to rip out you kids livers with rusty pliers!

*Russ runs on from off stage, himself, but as  
a 6th grader.*

*He carries on the two 'hot' shovels.*

RUSS

Don't look so scared Pegan, he probably couldn't tell a liver from an appendix.

PEGAN

(Back in her memory)

What's an appendix, Russ?

*Russ gives Pegan a shovel.*

RUSS

Here, help me dig.

PEGAN

How far?

*Russ exits.*

Russ? How far?

*Pegan starts digging a hole on stage by herself.*

(To Audience)

Randolph, the doomed German Sheppard, came swimming with us after we dug the hole. Which in retrospect was probably about 6 feet deep. Then we filled it with water.

(To class)

Always drink plenty of water. Become too dehydrated, and you'll shrivel.

(To audience)

After a couple minutes in the muddy pit, Randolph stopped paddling. That's what dogs do. They paddle. But Randolph stopped paddling. Blood clot somewhere between the ears and muzzle. And sank. We knew it was a stroke because he had already had two. His eyes would bug out slightly and he'd stop moving. Or swimming, in this case. Russ panicked and got out but I swam around looking for handfuls of fur. Randolph? Randolph!

*Sound of a dog yelp.*

Randolph?

*No sound.*

I wanted to fish him out but Mom...

*MOTHER enters, she in her mid thirties, the age when her kids are still young.*

MOTHER

It's going to be much easier to just wait till the water evaporates. Now patience, Pegan, is something I'm sure even you can learn.

PEGAN

I did, but I still can't find him. Russ told me that Randolph evaporated. I fantasize that he is floating around in a state somewhere between moisture and gas. Of course I wouldn't want that. I want to be buried. Deep, in the ground. Where nothing ever changes. I lie awake at night and pray nothing changes. Except maybe Randolph...

(To Class)

And now for the left side. Shake it out. Get used to where your bench is, address your bench.

(To audience)

Dad's stroke was different.

RUSS

(From the edge of the stage)

I didn't have to look for the body.

PEGAN

Mom says he had one because...

MOTHER

Too much stress at the new job, and too many cheeseburgers. Not enough exercise. Remember that, Russ.

*Mother exits.*

PEGAN

So me and Russ, we watch what we eat. Spaghetti. With tomato Sauce. Every night. We control what we eat because we can't keep our lives under control. I'm kidding.

We're in control.

(To Class)

Lift heel up, roll through foot. And Squeeze. Release. Squeeze...

(To audience)

Russ and I eat together every night, we've never lived apart. He tells me about his day and I listen. If I'm lucky he asks me about his day and I listen. It's like we're married.

*Russ enters with bowls of spaghetti and bottles of Marinara Sauce. Russ and Pegan use exercise balls as chairs as they eat. Except that only Russ eats.*

RUSS

I don't know what idiot is responsible, but the new signs today at the grocer crack me up. I mean what in the world does "seedless nut mix" mean?

PEGAN

Maybe...

RUSS

Nuts are seeds! They are! You know sometimes I think Mom's right, that it's impossible for people to get any smarter. Speaking of, do you have to leave your weights all over the place? It's hard for me to walk around here without tripping over some exercise equipment.

PEGAN

Well, it's hard for me to...

RUSS

I even found a dumbbell in the bath tub this morning. You know what wet metal smells like, Pegan?

PEGAN

Water?

RUSS

It's disgusting, you know what else is disgusting?

PEGAN

Spell-check again?

RUSS

Spell...Spell-check! What do they take me for? How can I edit if the damn thing thinks every technical term in the magazine is misspelled? It's ridiculous.

PEGAN

I can never spell "schedule."

RUSS

What?

PEGAN

Like your plans, your sched...

RUSS

So I found out why Kathy hasn't emailed me back in a month.

PEGAN

(To Audience)

Kathy being his internet girlfriend. Of, I don't know, 8 years. Who he's never met.

(To Russ)

She's dead?

RUSS

She's getting over an eating disorder. Made her get into these funny patterns. She said she couldn't write me until she jogged 6 miles but she could never make it, so she got trapped in trying. I guess Anorexia does that to a person.

PEGAN

Do you remember in high school, after everything, when I started having all those problems with my weight? I bet she just got caught up in...

RUSS

But I guess she's over it now, and wants to meet, so I forgive her. I guess...

PEGAN

...Anorexia does that to a person.

RUSS

Exactly. Ridiculous.

PEGAN

(To audience)  
Russ used to be fat. That was his thing.

*Lights up on Mother.*

MOTHER

The monkey on his back.

PEGAN

Except if it was a real monkey, he would have eaten it, not because he was hungry, just to shut up Mom's god damn metaphor.  
I used to be dumb. That was my monkey. The ways of killing my theoretical monkey aren't as funny. I mean it isn't going to just leave if I am dumber at it.

(To theoretical monkey)  
What's the capital of China? Don't know? Well me neither. Off you go!

*Pegan dislodges theoretical monkey and drops it in the freshly dug hole.  
We hear a soft but distinct thud.*

(To Audience)  
A stupid kid eating a monkey isn't funny.  
That's what fat people do.  
They eat.  
I don't know what dumb people are supposed to do. Try to stay put I guess.

(To class)  
Great warm up everyone. Now let's stretch it out.

*Pegan uses her foot to push some dust back  
in the hole. Russ continues to eat. Black out.*

*Scene 2.*

*10:15 Am Intermediate, step 6 to 8 inches.*

*Exercise music comes up: "Born to be wild."*

*Danny, who gives off the constant impression that he is ducking something, stands at the edge of the stage, watching her.*

PEGAN

(To class)

Ok, everyone. We're stepping it up a notch. Single, single, now double. Danny, if you're going to come to my classes you have to move or else wait for me by the water fountain.

(To audience)

I hate it when Danny comes, "jazzercise" classes he calls them. I hate the feeling of being watched. Other people watch me, but in a sort of dazed state between exhaustion and asphyxiation.

Danny just stares.

DANNY

(From the side of the stage)

I like to trace your freckles.

*Danny retreats off stage.*

PEGAN

(Not hearing him)

Yeah, I see you staring. Too lazy to actually work up a sweat, so just stares at my body, looking for fat to identify with. And smiles sometimes. People always look even dumber than they are when they smile that big.

(To class)

Is everyone having fun? Uh-huh! What were we born to be?

(To audience)

I met Danny in the grocery store when he was stocking tuna fish. Not that I love supermarkets, nobody loves supermarkets, but I like seeing all those things in repetition. And people lining up. You can watch people in lines for hours. They never change. I mean the people do but the line itself just keeps going.

*Danny wheels on a shelf. He starts stocking it with cans of tuna fish. He sees Pegan. Sound of a **heartbeat** speeding up.*

DANNY

Hello! Hi.

PEGAN

No thanks.

RUSS

Anything I can get for you?

PEGAN

No.

DANNY

Tuna fish?

PEGAN

You have any Marinara sauce?

DANNY

Is there Marinara sauce in tuna fish?

PEGAN

Tomato, you have any tomato sauce?

DANNY

Sure, sure...sure sure sure.

Say...would you want to...maybe...become involved in a situation where I follow you around in loving obsessive admiration but you don't remember my favorite kind of cereal even when I tell you about 50 times?

PEGAN

(To audience)

See I could never really date Danny because he's dumb. And so am I. It's harder to tell which one is dumber. At least dating someone smart, it would be clear cut. I wouldn't mind being the dumber one if I was with a smart guy, but being dumber than Danny? I'd rather take the stroke.

(beat)

Every date we have is like a race to see who's slower.

DANNY

(Looking in the hole and then sitting on top of the shelf)

How many days is it to China?

PEGAN

(Sitting next to him)

I don't think that's how you measure distance.

DANNY

How then?

PEGAN

I don't know. Fahrenheit?

DANNY

Isn't that for temperature?

PEGAN

Then what's Celsius?

DANNY

You're confusing me.

PEGAN

It was your stupid question!

DANNY

You could stay overnight if you wanted—we could look it up in the encyclopedia I got from that subscription service.

PEGAN

I go home for dinner.

DANNY

(Exiting, wheeling off the shelf)

Well. I'm looking it up while you're gone! It's under D. For distance.

*Danny hands her a can of tuna fish. Pegan drops it in the hole as he exits. A thud.*

PEGAN

I'm never going to China. Danny should know that.

(To class)

Hey, what were we born to be? That's right, WILD!

(To audience)

Now that things are going well again with Internet Kathy, Russ got me to try the whole online dating thing. I posted a profile online and everything.

It is really clever.

You can be clever on anonymous things because you never have to answer to them. Back them up with really being smart. You can put yourself out there to the world: 'Clever single woman; nice ass,' (although the ass is more of an implication from your photo, it's not like I actually say that) Course you can't SAY you're clever either. That's like saying you're funny. It's ironic because you can say you're dumb and everyone believes you, but it doesn't work like that for other things.

So: My catch phrase on this thing, the online dating site: "Easy like the SAT." I didn't pay much attention in high school, but from what I remember, some people think it's hard and others find it real easy. I want to meet the guys who think it's easy. Smart guys. Danny didn't even take the SAT. Tried though. He gets to the test and when he reads the sample question, he has an asthma attack. Course that's what HE calls it. He doesn't have asthma. He had a panic attack. Hey, if he can call what I do "jazzercise," then I can say he had a panic attack.

*Danny enters with a chair and attached desk. He is 17.*

MODERATOR (V.O)

If at any time you find yourself unable to complete the test for any reason raise your hand and the moderator will seal your test booklet and rip up your answer sheet. Remember to use a standard number two pencil and fill in the bubbles completely. You may begin.

*Sound of a **heartbeat** speeding up.*

DANNY

Chicago is A) a state B) a city C) a county D) a continent.  
Moderator? Excuse me?

MODERATOR (V.O.)

Quiet. Keep your eyes on your own test booklet.

DANNY

Chicago, I've been to Chicago. It's in Illinois. Illinois is the capital of...um...they sell corn. Chicago is known for corn. Children are from the corn. Moderator? Who grows children? Moderator?!?

*Sound of **heartbeat** gets louder. Danny rips up his test booklet and runs off.*

PEGAN

I want to meet the kind of guy who's smart enough to take the SAT. And win.

(To class)

Ease up the pressure now. Great. Now let's pick up the pace and burn some calories. I hope all of you have dinner plans. I do.

*Black out.*

*Scene 3*

*10:20 Am. Let me hear your feet.*

*Exercise Music. Lights up.*

PEGAN (CONT'D)

(To class)

Three, two, one. Kick, Kick, Kick, come on. Let me see you lift those fat thighs Mrs. Perkins. Lift em!

(To audience)

Russ is getting engaged.  
I think it's a little quick.

(To class)

Kick, Kick, kick. New combination.

(To audience)

I mean, what's 8 years when they were online? They hadn't seen each other in person until Kathy comes over to our house last night while I was at the gym. To where we eat and sleep, and lift.

And Russ feeds her my spaghetti.

So now she knows he likes it but they've never lived together. She has no idea. I mean, boy, is she going to be in for a surprise. Marinara Mondays. Tuesdays. Wednesdays. Thursdays. By Friday of their honey moon she's going to want to shoot herself right over the Prego. And I bet she would too. I mean. They met online. You meet crazies online.

(To class)

I said lift it Mrs. Perkins! March!

*Russ and KATHY enter wheeling on the small dinner table topped with two bowls of spaghetti and a jar of Marinara Sauce. Pegan watches her fantasy.*

KATHY

Spaghetti, again, Russ, really? Isn't that a little silly?

RUSS

You know what's silly? The articles I'm supposed to copy edit. All they hire are computer technicians, couldn't piece together a sentence if their life depended on it, so this last one, I ask the guy...

KATHY

Russ, I can't live like this!

RUSS

I ask him if he's ever even heard of a verb and he...

*Kathy takes out a gun and shoots herself—  
right over the Marinara Sauce.*

RUSS

Ridiculous.

*Kathy and Russ exit with the dinner table.*

PEGAN

Crazies. You meet crazies online. It's not going to last. Change never does. It...

*Sound of a dog barking.*

Randolph? Randolph?

*No Sound.*

Oh. Change. Never lasts. It's bad for the blood.

*Sound of a collar jingling.*

Randolph?

*Pegan runs off stage. Black out.*

*Scene 4.*  
*Lights up. Transition NOW.*

*Exercise music comes up but quickly fades. The small dinner table and two chairs are on stage. Kathy and Russ have just sat down to dinner. Pegan enters, wiping sweat off her face.*

RUSS

Kathy, I want you meet my sister, Peggy, we call her Pegan.

KATHY

Nice to meet you! I've heard so much about you, and I've really been looking forward to meeting you.

PEGAN

You don't look like your picture.

KATHY

Oh, well, I've lost weight since then.

PEGAN

Working out isn't for everyone.

KATHY

You teach Jazzercise isn't that right?

PEGAN

That's not what we call it.

RUSS

Kathy's family has a history of heart attack too.

PEGAN

Stroke, we have a history of stroke, Russ.

KATHY

That's practically the same. We all have to be careful.

PEGAN

No! It's not practically the same, at all. Precautions for a heart attack—when the heart momentarily stops preventing it from pumping blood, are very different from a stroke—a blockage in the blood stream, a clot caused by a *foreign* material, cutting off oxygen from the brain.

So it suffocates.

Heart momentarily stops *versus* clot. Russ, I don't see how this is going to work if she moves in, with her looking out for her heart and you and me preparing for a stroke.

KATHY

Well, Peggy, I don't think it *is* going to work like that.

PEGAN

Good.

KATHY

Russ told me YOU were moving out.

*Sound of a heartbeat speeding up.*

PEGAN

What? Where? Russ? Where?

RUSS

Not this second, Pegan, but I printed you out a few internet listings; we'll find you a place.

KATHY

It'll be a nice change.

PEGAN

But that's the point! You may not have to do it when you're avoiding a heart attack...Kath, but part of a stroke is limiting change!

RUSS

Nothings going to change—you'll still come over and make me dinner sometimes.

PEGAN

It's not going to be the same Russ, she doesn't have what siblings have, she's not going to listen to all your stories about coworkers who are bad at spelling, and make sure you're breathing right when you do your crunches. She won't sweat with you like I do. And how am I going to make dinner every night if I don't live here? They keep me busy with classes at the gym. Sometimes I feel as though I never get through them. And it's important that I work out too.

KATHY

When I make you dinner Russ, I could even add some grilled scallops to the spaghetti.

PEGAN

No! No shellfish. No. Too high in cholesterol. See, she's already trying to mess up the system. I can make the spaghetti, something bad might happen if she does.

KATHY

Nothing bad's going to happen, if you want it plain, I'll make it plain.

RUSS

I want it plain.

(To Kathy)

So, how was your day?

*Sound of the **heartbeat** rapidly beating.  
Black out.*

*Scene 5.*  
*10:30 Am. Repeat.*

*Exercise Music. Lights up.*

PEGAN

(To class)

Let's start this one out slowly—I don't want anyone pulling their hamstrings.

(To audience)

Well, it's funny you ask, because my day was actually excitingly...consistent—except for my memory.

*Kathy enters with two shovels. Pegan's memory—manipulated.*

KATHY

Don't look so scared, Pegan, he probably couldn't tell a liver from an appendix.

PEGAN

What?

KATHY

(Giving her a shovel)

Here, help me dig.

PEGAN

How far?

Kathy? How far? Shouldn't you be making dinner?

*Kathy starts digging deeper into the hole on stage.*

KATHY

(As Pegan)

Kathy, the doomed internet fiancé, came swimming with us after we dug the hole. Which in retrospect was probably about 6 feet deep—or wherever you bury a body. And we filled it with water. After a couple minutes in the muddy pit, Kathy stopped paddling. That's what bitchy fiancés do. They doggy paddle. Blood clot somewhere between the ears and muzzle. And sank. We knew it was a heart attack because they ran in her family. No running from what runs in your family.

PEGAN

Unless it's on a treadmill.

KATHY

Her eyes bugged out slightly and she stopped moving. Stopped swimming. Russ panicked and got out but I swam around looking for handfuls of hair. Kathy? Kathy!

*No sound.*

PEGAN

I wanted to fish her out but mom told me to wait till the water evaporates.

KATHY

(As Pegan)

I did, but I still can't find her. Russ claims that Kathy evaporated. I fantasize that she is floating around in a state somewhere between moisture and gas. I lie awake at night and pray nothing changes.

PEGAN

Except Kathy.

*Russ enters with a shovel, unseen by Kathy.  
He hits her over the head. She evaporates.  
Black out.*

*Scene 6.*  
**10:35 Am. March.**

*Exercise music—something from their youth. Lights up on Russ, 14 years old. He is standing in the middle of the stage, deflated from having recently lost a lot of weight.*

RUSS

I may be fat. But, I can lose weight. If you're dumb, your only option is to stay put.

*The Mother enters—desperate.*

MOTHER

March, March, March! Come on Russo, lift the knees.

*Russ starts marching in place.  
And sweating. Profusely.*

*Pegan enters. She stands watching her  
Mother dictate Russ's regiment.*

RUSS

I started dieting when I was 10.

PEGAN

And the weight was gone by 13.

MOTHER

Just fruits, vegetables, pastas, nuts, fish, lean poultry, and whole grains.

RUSS

But it was hard to remember what to eat, and what not to.

MOTHER

Like potatoes, Twinkies, shellfish...

RUSS

Which was stressful.

MOTHER

...carrots, bananas, candy, most dairy, red meat...

PEGAN

But she kept going. Even though he was already thin—even though there's nothing left to change.

MOTHER

Stop being so stressed, you're going to give yourself a stroke. Now lift em!  
Off the ground. What, are your feet attached to, weights?

PEGAN

Except his mind. His matter. Solid to gas.

RUSS

So Mom simplified the dieting. Just spaghetti.

MOTHER

Every night.

RUSS

So I wouldn't clot.

PEGAN

Me neither.

RUSS

And I started working out when I was 12.

MOTHER  
(Looking at her watch)

It's 10:35. You're behind! We should have started this when you were 7.

RUSS

It would have been easier, without the yelling.

MOTHER

What are you doing? You're barely moving. Let me help you. You want to stay this way forever? You want the same thing to happen to you?

RUSS

Which was stressful.

*Sound of a **heartbeat** speeding up.*

PEGAN

And stress causes strokes.

RUSS

And thinking about strokes causes stress.

MOTHER

So March.

RUSS

March.

MOTHER

March.

*Russ starts to hyperventilate. He is having a panic attack.*

RUSS

March.

PEGAN

Stop!

RUSS

Stress.

PEGAN

Stop!

MOTHER

Stroke.

PEGAN

Stop!

*Russ collapses. Mother exits.  
Pegan runs over to Russ.*

Mom? Mom! He's having a stroke. I think now Russ is having a stroke!

RUSS

I'm not.

PEGAN

Mom, mom, he's having a stroke!!

RUSS

Peg, Pegan, I'm not! I'm 14 years old.

PEGAN

What are you doing then?

RUSS

She's still trying to change me, Pegan. Promise you won't let her change me.

PEGAN

That's the stroke talking.

RUSS

Pegan, promise!

PEGAN

Ok, ok, I promise!

*Russ exits, leaving Pegan alone on stage.*

Sometimes I fantasize Russ did have a real stroke, like...  
Like Randolph. Then she would have felt so bad, she would have felt awful, for trying to  
change us...and not being able to change Dad. But Russ doesn't have to worry. You  
don't have to worry Russ! I'm here now. I'm keeping him on track.

*Black Out.*

*Scene 7*

*10:40 AM. Watch what you eat.*

*Exercise music comes up but quickly fades.  
Lights up on the dinner table. Pegan is  
boiling water. Kathy enters.*

KATHY

Oh, Pegan, I didn't know you would be helping me with dinner.

PEGAN

Just getting the water ready.

KATHY

What for?

PEGAN

What do you think, Kathy?

KATHY

Dinner?

PEGAN

Spaghetti.

KATHY

I told your brother this was going to happen.

PEGAN

What?

KATHY

Nothing. And you know, I don't mind. I hate heating water on these old stoves anyways. But maybe you just forgot? They must keep you busy at the gym. But I'm actually cooking dinner tonight!

PEGAN

Or maybe *you* forgot...

KATHY

*Plain* spaghetti, I remember, don't worry, nothing crazy is going to happen with some stringy pasta and tomato paste. (beat).

Plus, I was sort of looking forward to your tutelage; I mean I'm going to need some help getting it right so I can squeeze into your brother's routine he's got going there. And I know you're a great teacher, I hear wonderful things about your exercise classes.

PEGAN

Sometimes I wonder if I ever get through them.

KATHY

Nonsense, I'm sure you're fine.

PEGAN

Actually...

KATHY

Just hand me the noodles, Pegan.

*Pegan hands over the pot.*

KATHY CONT.

So what do I do first?

PEGAN

You want to boil the water. Put a lid over the pot so it doesn't all evaporate.

KATHY

Great! Smells good doesn't it?

PEGAN

Smells like water. Add the noodles.

*Kathy adds the noodles to the boiling water.*

KATHY

Has anyone ever told you, you have a very unusual nick name?

PEGAN

Yes.

KATHY

Great! (beat) So what's it from? I used to know this girl, when I was in high school...

*Kathy continues to mouth words but we don't hear her.*

PEGAN

(To audience)

I bet you were fat. I bet that's what this is all about. I bet the fat is still congealed in there somewhere, hidden in your arteries buried below your skinny muscle.

KATHY

...and I thought *that* was an unusual nick name.

PEGAN

My dad named me Megan. Pegan's what Russ calls me, because I'll believe anything.

KATHY

I'll keep that in mind! I'm kidding.

PEGAN

I'm in control.

KATHY

What?

PEGAN

Strain the noodles.

*Kathy does.*

KATHY

Strained!

PEGAN

And add the sauce, it's really not that complicated.

KATHY

Pegan, can I ask you something? What happened to your father?

PEGAN

You didn't talk to Russ?

KATHY

I haven't had a chance.

PEGAN

In 8 years of e-mailing, you never asked him?

KATHY

Of course I did, it's not that easy thinking up a letter's worth of material every week. Russ only talks about how they misspelled your father's name in the obituary.

PEGAN

Oh.

KATHY

That is so sad.

PEGAN

Your father having a stroke right before sort of puts spelling in perspective.

KATHY

Of course. So is that how he died, had a stroke and boomp?

PEGAN

Is there usually more?

KATHY

No, but I read online somewhere that just the brain dies after a stroke and the body can go on living without oxygen.

*Sound of a **heartbeat**...still beating.*

PEGAN

Unless you bury the body.  
Parmesan?

KATHY

Oh, of course, thank you!

PEGAN

(To audience)  
Unable to think of better sabotage, I replaced Parmesan with detergent.

KATHY

Just sprinkle it on top?

PEGAN

Sure.

KATHY

Russ, come in here, dinner's ready. Russ!

*Russ enters. All three sit down at the table.  
Pegan doesn't eat.  
As Pegan talks, Russ and Kathy start  
foaming at the mouth.*

PEGAN

(To audience)

I've never liked how dependent we are on food. Providing a transitory solution to an essential problem—kind of pointless. Ridiculous even. Instead of just eating once and getting it over with we have to return to it every day. Burying more and more food into our arteries and making our hearts pump it through so we don't clot.

I don't get it. But that's no surprise, I don't get a lot of things.

Sometimes I fantasize that we can just clean ourselves out with soap, wash away our edible indiscretions with detergent. It's worse when you change, harder for your body to cleanse away. I feel sorry for people who have to make a new decision every meal. At least I know what I'm getting into.

RUSS

(Speaking though soap suds)

Pegan!

PEGAN

Shit.

KATHY

Russ, what's going on?

RUSS

What did you do to this, Kathy! Your pasta gave me rabies. I've got rabies.

PEGAN

You don't have rabies, Russ. Russ, Russ! You don't have rabies.

RUSS

Stress.

PEGAN

Listen to me, Russ, I don't think you have rabies, I think you're just having a bad reaction to her spaghetti.

RUSS

Stress causes strokes.

KATHY  
(Sputtering soap suds)

Russ, I'm dying!

RUSS

Stress.

PEGAN

You don't have rabies, Russ, you ate soap.

RUSS

That's not part of my diet.

PEGAN

I accidentally gave it to Kathy instead of parmesan.

RUSS

Jesus, Pegan, are you too stupid to read labels now?

PEGAN

Usually I put everything in myself. See, this is what happens when you try to change.

KATHY

I thought that's what was going on.

PEGAN

You did not, you thought you were dying!

RUSS

Are you trying to kill me, Pegan?

PEGAN

No!

RUSS

I don't do well with stress, especially not stress with food.

PEGAN

See, if you'd just let me cook.

RUSS

I think you should move out.

PEGAN

Where?

RUSS

Go back to Mom's.

PEGAN

Russ. No. It scares me.

RUSS

It's just our back yard.

PEGAN

Russ.

RUSS

Go.

PEGAN

Now?

RUSS

Yes.

PEGAN

Over dinner?

RUSS

Get out.

KATHY

It had to happen eventually.

PEGAN

You need me.

RUSS

I have Kathy.

PEGAN

Russ.

RUSS

Out.

PEGAN

Russ!

*Sound of a **heartbeat**.*

RUSS

March.

***Heartbeat**. Stops.  
Blackout.*

*Scene 8.*  
*10:40 AM Single-Single Double.*  
*Exercise music. Lights up.*

PEGAN

(To class)

If you're getting tired, keep your hands at your hips. Are you all with me?  
Abdominals in. Like you mean it.

(To audience)

Sleeping at the gym isn't much of a change. I fall asleep on a yoga mat at night with two towels folded up as a pillow. I'd tell my class I sleep here, but I think it's important for at least one part of these people's lives not to be tragic. People who come to mass work-out sessions are the same type of people whose lives are out of control—the same type of people as me. It's important to have one element of their lives be energetic.

Up beat. Manic even. Happy. Even if artificial.

So I don't tell people I sleep at the gym. After this step class, and my kickboxing class, and whatever I have after that, I'll hide in the steam shower until everyone leaves. And then I'll fall asleep next to my weights and scales and fantasize that I'm still living with Russ. It really isn't that much of a change, every morning the sweat from the day before settles on the equipment like dew before it evaporates by noon. Sometimes I think the room itself is perspiring.

(To class)

Does anyone want to take a heart check? Find your pulse at your neck or at your wrist and start counting the number of pulses. Ready, One.

*Sound of a **heartbeat**, being monitored.*  
*Kathy enters, toting Danny.*

KATHY

Pegan! I thought I might find you here.

PEGAN

Kathy?

(To class)

It's OK class, keep counting. Five.

DANNY

Hi, Pegan.

PEGAN

Danny.

KATHY

I have great news for you, Pegan.

PEGAN

Does this really have to happen now?

KATHY

It's not like I can wait till after your class.

PEGAN

Why not?

KATHY

I'm not convinced you'll ever get through it.

DANNY

Hi, Pegan.

PEGAN

What is it then?

(To class)  
Fifteen.

KATHY

Russ and I felt really bad since the detergent incident for you not having a place to live.

PEGAN

Ah.

KATHY

But more than that, we've felt awful for you being alone.

PEGAN

I'm not alone, I have Russ.

KATHY

That's the thing. You don't. I have Russ.

PEGAN

What do you want?

KATHY

And on a deeper level I just always felt sort of bad for how things were working out with Danny. I mean I think you guys could really work it out if you didn't, you know, think that way about him.

DANNY

Hi, Pegan.

PEGAN

(To Danny)  
Hello!

KATHY

So, I did you both a favor and took Danny to retake the SATs. Look!

*Kathy hands Pegan a test score.*

It turns out he's not nearly as dumb as you thought.

PEGAN

Kathy.

KATHY

Now you can be together.

DANNY

Kathy told me you needed me to be the smart one. I can be the smart one for you, Pegan. You don't have to be stressed. Look, I brought you tuna fish!

PEGAN

No, no, no, no.

KATHY

Look Pegan, he loves you with tuna fish.

PEGAN

No, I can't. I'm sorry, Danny. I can't. I live at the gym now. I perspire with the gym. I can't.

KATHY

But he's smart now.

DANNY

I'll be the smart one for you. I'll keep things in control with you with my smarts. I'll never let you change.

PEGAN

No, Danny, you won't. I don't care what you got on a test. You're stupid. And me being around you makes me feel stupider. You panic when I take your temperature and you hyperventilate when people spill milk in the dairy isles. When I look into your face I see all the ideas that I sometimes think I have but I can't express because they get caught somewhere, clogged in my brain arteries. And all I can see in you is that clot.

*Sound of a heart beating.*  
*Sound of a heart breaking.*

DANNY

Then I hate the way you see.

*Danny exits throwing the tuna fish and the SAT scores into the hole. Thud. Thud.*

KATHY

Pegan! Now what are you going to do? Are you going to die alone in some hole? Because I'm not going to dig you out. And neither is Russ.

PEGAN

That's nothing new to me, Kathy, I already know he leaves things for dead.

*Blackout. Sound of a dog barking.*

*Scene 9.*  
*10:45 AM. Pulse.*

*Exercise music. Lights up.*

PEGAN

(To class)

Good, 60. Shake out your wrist. Get the blood flowing again. Sometimes you can squeeze too tight. If your heart rate is low, you're not working hard enough. Everyone else is ahead.

(To audience)

If I'm going to be with anyone, I'll meet him online. He'll look at me and see the beauty of routine with loyal intelligence. Just like Randolph.

(On date)

So your profile says you like the opera? I like the opera. That's singing right? Oh, really, will you sing something for me?

*Sound of a dog barking.*

I like it. Oh, I teach aerobics. I help people get into shape when I'm in a bad one. What do you do?

*Sound of a dog barking.*

Oh, sure, I love physics. That's the science of matter and energy right? Oh yeah, I like that. I deal a lot with energy too. You know, keeping it up, using it...I think it's very important.

*Sound of a dog barking.*

But I have to think too! I think all the time during my exercise classes. Practically all I do is think. Sometimes I think I'm so busy thinking I'm never going to actually get through a class! But wait! I could think smart things too! Don't look at me like that. I could be smarter by association. It'll enter me, eventually, like osmosis. Wait, wait! Randolph?

*Blackout.*

*Scene 10.*  
*Lights up. Russ enters. With shovels.*  
*Pegan's memory—out of her control.*

RUSS

Don't look so scared Pegan, he probably couldn't tell a liver from an appendix.

PEGAN

Why won't someone tell me what an appendix is?

*Russ hands Pegan a shovel.*

RUSS

Here, help me dig.

PEGAN

How far?

Russ, how far?

I'm afraid to see what's down there.

*Russ starts digging deeper into the hole on stage.*

RUSS

Dad, the overweight father, came swimming with us as part of Mom's new exercise regiment after we dug our hole. Which in retrospect was probably about 6 feet, or wherever you bury a body. We filled it with water. After a couple minutes though in the muddy pit, Dad stopped paddling. That's what father's do. They daddy paddle. Blood clot somewhere between the squint and the fist. And sank. We knew it was a stroke because he had already had two. His eyes would open slightly and he'd stop moving or swimming. I freaked and got out but Pegan swam around looking for handfuls of hair and beard.

PEGAN

Dad! Dad!!

RUSS

She wanted to fish him out but Mom told us to just wait till the water evaporates.

PEGAN

I did, but I still can't find him.

RUSS

When it finally evaporated the body was so bloated we had to just bury him there. I told Pegan Dad evaporated, because it's Pegan, she's dumb enough to believe anything.

PEGAN

Sometimes I think I can hear his heartbeat.

RUSS

When someone has a stroke, sometimes it's just the brain that is dying. The body keeps on living—the heart beating.

*Sound of a **heartbeat**. Buried.*

PEGAN

I fantasize that he is floating around in a state somewhere between moisture and gas.

RUSS

I fantasize that he's still down there, safe in our hole. Free from both change and routine.

PEGAN

I fantasize that most everything escaped in a non-solid state. But his heart and my family and everything else shriveled up into something too tiny and hard to remember. But maybe not too small to dig back up.

*Blackout.*

*Scene 11.*  
*10:50 AM. Avoiding Injury.*  
*Exercise music. Lights Up.*

PEGAN

(To class)

At this point in the class, you may be so exhausted it's hard to remember what you've done.

But it's important to try to keep things straight: knees, elbow alignment—memories. If you don't, we may forget where we left off, and then, it's even harder to remember...remember...remember how to finish.

*Kathy enters. Dressed in work-out attire.*

KATHY

Pegan, Pegan, come here a second.

PEGAN

I told you, Kathy, I'm not going with Danny. I'd rather date a dog.

KATHY

No, I know, I should have known that. I mean who wants to sleep with a grocer who needs help alphabetizing cereal? But I finally figured it out.

PEGAN

What out, Kathy? Do we really need to do this now? At this rate, I'm never getting out of here.

KATHY

Exactly! I finally figured out how we could connect. On a deeper level. Exercise! I'm joining your exercise class! Isn't that exciting? Doesn't that get your heart racing? It gets mine going just thinking about it. We're going to be sisters, Pegan, I want us to have that connection.

PEGAN

You can't just come in now for the good stuff. Being a sibling is a whole lot harder than doing a couple step kicks and bam! Connection! It means being there through the night when you can't swim or even paddle, and holding the toothbrush when you have to throw up shellfish and bananas. Being a sibling means more than you're ready for, more than

you can control.

KATHY

Of course I don't mean literally. That would make Russ and me related and that's just gross, especially when we're almost married.

PEGAN

It was almost like we were married.

KATHY

So I've signed up for the full session!

PEGAN

If I'm lucky, I listened.

KATHY

Where do I begin? Should I start stepping?

PEGAN

You're not warmed up.

KATHY

I don't mind.

PEGAN

I do, the last thing I need is someone having a stroke.

KATHY

But I'm not at risk for strokes, it's heart attacks.

PEGAN

The last thing I need is someone having a heart attack. It's bad—for your heart.

KATHY

Well, I'd imagine.

PEGAN

You know what you need to do first?

KATHY

Anything, I'm all yours for the next...(to Pegan's class) how long does this class run?

PEGAN

Steam shower. Let off some steam. Here, I'll heat it up.

*Pegan flips a switch near the opaque glass door. It appears to be filling up with steam. Pegan opens the door and pushes Kathy in.*

PEGAN

Here, tension release. Good for the heart.

KATHY

It's getting hot.

*Pegan sets a bar against the door, blocking it shut. She leans on it to hold it closed.*

PEGAN

Good. Good for the heart. Blocks. Releases blockages.

(To class)

Are you feeling it class? Are you feeling the release? Feel the release class! Tell me you're feeling it!

*No sound from class. No sound. No sound. Kathy Starts screaming. Steam starts to pour out around door.*

KATHY

Pegan? It's too hot. Pegan! Help me. Pegan!!

*Pegan turns up the heat.  
We see Kathy's hand print on the door.  
Very sex scene in Titanic. Except twisted.*

*As Kathy is screaming, her voice is getting  
higher and higher.*

KATHY

I'm shrinking. My heart, Pegan. My heart is shrinking.

*As Kathy "shrinks" we see progressively  
smaller and smaller hand prints pressed up  
against the opaque glass further and further  
down. We hear a *heartbeat* get smaller and  
faster.*

PEGAN

Sometimes I fantasize that all my bad thoughts, all my dumb thoughts, all my FAT thoughts, are evaporated. And what's left shrivels up into a clot so tiny that even a surgeon couldn't dig it out. No, surgeon's don't dig.

What do you call people who dig, Kathy? Not grave diggers, there's got to be another word. Because you dig for other reasons don't you, Kathy?

There's got to be something else I'm looking for, digging for, come on, tell me there's something else I'm dig-dying for!

KATHY

(In a very tiny, very high voice)

Help.

*Pegan comes back into the moment and  
peeks inside the steam room.*

PEGAN

Shit! She's shrunk!

(To Class)

Does anyone have an extra water bottle? Shit. Didn't anyone bring water? I dehydrated my brother's internet fiancé!

(beat)

Oh, you're all fat!

(To audience)

What am I going to do? Maybe. Maybe. I could chop her into tiny pieces and pour her in the oregano. No, who am I kidding? I'm not a cook! Maybe I could drown her in tomato sauce. A muddy pit of tomato sauce. I guess...though I'd prefer if she didn't die. I'd probably lose my job. Say, Kathy? Tiny Kathy...?

*Sound of a dog barking off stage. Pegan opens the door.*

PEGAN

Randolph? Oh Randolph, it's you, I need you help me think this one through.

*Randolph, is on the other side of the steam room door,, growling. He picks up Kathy and starts to shake her. We see all this as shadow through the opaque glass. Or just hear it.*

PEGAN

(Following the dog into steam room)

No, No, Randolph, bad dog. Put the fiancé down! Randolph!

*Blackout.*

*We hear more growling and faint squeals from Kathy, followed by the sound of paws digging the earth and something small, perhaps the size of a tuna, being buried on stage.*

*Scene 12.*  
*10:55 AM Break-ing.*

*Exercise music. Lights up. Pegan and Danny are on stage, feverishly digging at the ground with poles, weights, finger nails. Piles of dirt surround them.*

PEGAN

No, Danny, listen, I told you it's the same hole as all the other stuff.

DANNY

What other stuff?

PEGAN

Everything, everything I bury.

DANNY

Pegan, I haven't seen you bury anything.

PEGAN

It doesn't have to be literally!

DANNY

So what are we looking for?

PEGAN

If you see weights or monkeys or cans of tuna, or SAT scores; we're on the right track.

DANNY

Oh! I think I found something!

PEGAN

What?

DANNY

Oh, wait, just turnips. False alarm.

PEGAN

Then keep looking. Randolph buried Kathy somewhere around here.

DANNY

What if she's dead?

PEGAN

She's not.

DANNY

How would you know? Last I checked people need air to, you know, not die.

PEGAN

That shows how little you know, doesn't it, Danny? When people shrink, their body does something special. It's like how people can keep on living when they freeze. How their hearts keep beating even though the rest of their bodies have stopped functioning. When you shrivel all the water leaves your body and when what's left is buried underground, it's impossible to breathe normally so your body has to find an alternative, interior source of respiration without oxygen. It's almost like when you have a stroke.

DANNY

How do you know all this?

PEGAN

Russ told me.

DANNY

How'd he find out?

PEGAN

Online.

DANNY

You can't find out that sort of thing online.

PEGAN

If you can find the love of your life online, you can find out how bodies work. So dig!

DANNY

I think I hear something?

*Danny kneels down to the ground.*

PEGAN

What? Where?

DANNY

Down here, a faint heartbeat.

*Sound of a faint **heartbeat**.*

PEGAN

Danny, don't be stupid, that's the sound of your own.

*Heart beat fades.*

DANNY

Oh, yeah. That's funny.

PEGAN

Why?

DANNY

I thought it stopped after you.

PEGAN

That is funny but.

DANNY

But what?

PEGAN

But keep digging.

DANNY

I would have loved you, you know. Even if I couldn't have been smart enough, I would have loved you.

PEGAN

You barely know me.

DANNY

You don't have to grow up with someone to know them. You don't have to be related to someone to care about them. In fact, sometimes I think our families are the people we know the least about. Because we're afraid to ask the questions.

PEGAN

Because of the answers.

DANNY

I know I'm not your brother. I know I'm not mixed in there with your memories or even in your reinterpretations of your memories, but that doesn't mean I don't know you. It may even mean I know you better because I see the you that's covered up. If you come live with me, I won't make you always be what you are, what you've forced yourself to be. I won't let you lose control by trying to be in control.

PEGAN

It's too late.

DANNY

Why?

PEGAN

I've lost control.

*Blackout.*

*Scene 13.*

**10:59. Last chance to change position.**

*Exercise music comes up then fades.*

*Lights up on dinner table.*

*Russ is sitting down as Pegan serves him spaghetti.*

RUSS

She didn't like the water. I'm not even sure she knows how to swim.

PEGAN

Sure she does—you barely know her.

RUSS

But the navy?

PEGAN

Really, Russ, who joins the Navy who doesn't like the water?

RUSS

You can enlist just like that?

PEGAN

Yeah, yeah! I'm just glad things are back the way they were.

RUSS

Is she going to have to fight? Do they give you a gun in the Navy?

PEGAN

Some things we just have to accept what we're being told. I have.

RUSS

I don't know.

PEGAN

You don't know what? Don't worry, she'll love the Navy. People love the Navy.

RUSS

I keep thinking that she has shriveled away. That's she's here but too thin to see. She used to have issues with Anorexia, remember?

PEGAN

In high school I—

RUSS

And last week she said she was thinking about working out, I'm afraid there's nothing left of her.

PEGAN

I'm sure something.

RUSS

I just hate to think about her wasting away.

PEGAN

It's better this way, now that we're together again, life is clean, there's nothing stopping, nothing clotting, now—

RUSS

If something happened, you'd have told me?

PEGAN

Just like you did with Dad?

RUSS

She didn't leave, did she? She didn't join the Navy. Did you do something—what did you do, Pegan?

PEGAN

I didn't do anything! Why do you blame me for everything!

RUSS

Why do you do everything?

PEGAN

What do you mean?

RUSS

It was your idea to dig the hole.

*Sound of a **heartbeat** speeding up.*

PEGAN

You brought the shovels.

RUSS

And who made him come swimming?

PEGAN

Mom.

*Mothers enters, stands on the periphery of the stage.*

RUSS

You know why? Don't you know why?

PEGAN

Mom wanted him to lose weight, she was worried.

RUSS

You called him "FAT."

PEGAN

I was 9. And he was fat. My calling him that didn't change anything, it didn't.

RUSS

But you *called* him fat—you called us both fat. So Mom.

PEGAN

(To Heartbeat)  
Stop.

*Heartbeat stops.*

RUSS

You're not the one who had to bury him.

PEGAN

What?

RUSS

You were just so happy to think that Dad just evaporated and floated away.

PEGAN

That's what *you* told me.

RUSS

And you were so happy to believe it. Evaporated? I'd be surprised if he isn't a liquid by now. Even you aren't that stupid.

PEGAN

I didn't believe it; I'm not stupid; I just buried the rest.

RUSS

And me. You've buried me in some ridiculous system of control. Some manic attempt to lock me in or under with pasta and calisthenics. But *I* am still alive.

*Kathy enters, sweaty.*

KATHY

Yeah, me too.

PEGAN

Uh-oh.

RUSS

Kathy! What happened to you?

PEGAN

Russ! Don't get mad. Please. She's fine. Aren't you fine? Just a little muddy, maybe? Kathy, please. Please. You don't even look like you were buried underground. Tell him I didn't shrink you in the steam shower.

RUSS

Jesus, Pegan.

KATHY

You didn't.

PEGAN

See, I didn't! I didn't shrink you to the size of a can of tuna and Randolph didn't bury you in the dirt and the perspiration from the gym didn't help you rehydrate and recondense. Tell Russ that.

KATHY

Of course not. The janitor let me out.

PEGAN

What?

KATHY

After you locked me in the Aerobics studio and left, the janitor let me out.

PEGAN

No. No. No. You shrunk.

KATHY

I might have from hunger if I was in there a few more hours.

PEGAN

Stop saying that.

KATHY

What?

PEGAN

You shrunk. You shriveled. I saw you.

RUSS

Pegan, get a grip.

PEGAN

I have a grip—I had a grip.

RUSS

Pegan, really. This is ridiculous.

KATHY

Don't worry, we'll send you jam when you move into your new place.

PEGAN

I don't eat jam.

KATHY

And be sure to give us your new address as soon as you know so we can be sure to forward your mail.

PEGAN

No, Russ.

KATHY

Listen, Pegan. Do you know how embarrassing it is to be found in the gym? He actually thought I was living there.

PEGAN

No. No. No.

RUSS

I've had enough of this, Pegan. I'm done with rehashing and resurfacing. I dealt with these things a long time ago. I don't want to hear about your memories. I don't want to hear about your fantasies. Unless you come up with one where it's you buried underground.

PEGAN

No! I am not buried. I am not. I'm getting out. I'm digging out. I'm done controlling things for you, Russ. I'm turning myself into a gas. My molecules are moving too fast to stay put. To stay solid. Are you breathing, Russ? You can breathe me in. But breathe me back out. I'm getting out.

*Blackout.*

*Scene 14.*  
*5 Minutes After. Exercise Music.*

*Lights up on Pegan alone on stage.*

PEGAN

(To class)

Exhale now. Again. Ok, then reverse the stretch. And forward. Have you ever noticed that we never focus on the things about ourselves that we do like? Squeeze it in now. Extend through spine. I mean, it can't be all bad? Right? Nothing this tight can be all bad.

OK and reach. Join the hands. And release. Who isn't breathing? No, no, I can definitely hear that someone isn't breathing. Well, if some of you are suffocating out there, there's no way to tell. You'll have to try to change positions yourself.

(To audience)

I've moved on from the gym, I mean out of. But I'm keeping it with me, here, underground. I've moved out of the gym. And in with Danny.

It makes the most sense. Kathy's back with Russ, and while I know he still loves me, he still loves me, there is the whole trying to kill her thing, twice.

I wasn't allowed to go to the wedding today, but that doesn't mean I don't feel it. That's the thing about me and Russ.

He's in my muscle memory.

I think he's raising his glass for a toast, champagne probably, and now he's about to cut the cake.

(To Russ, off stage)

Wait, Russ! You can't have that in you!

(beat)

(To audience)

I forget that's not my job anymore. Turns out maybe food was never the clot. Turns out I was.

(beat)

So now I live with Danny. Like hemophilia. We flow through routine like it was in our veins. Sometimes I lie awake in bed at night and pray that something changes. Then he rolls over and tries to kiss the freckles on my knee. And I have to kick his chin with my shin.

But Danny's not so bad. I don't mean that he's so bad. I guess he keeps me honest. I mean it has been awhile since I tried to poison anyone with cleaner fluid.

Not a long while. But a while.

But that doesn't mean I don't steal back here.

(To class)

I wouldn't leave you. Not before we've gotten a work out!

*She starts to go through an exercise routine, alone, on stage. As she does the music fades out.*

PEGAN

(To Audience)

Do you hear that? It's beating with me, beating me, keeping me on beat!

*She places her ear to the ground. As she does, the sound of a **heartbeat** rises. She works out to the beat.*

Do you hear that? My name is Pegan, I'm back on track.

*She starts working out furiously. The **heartbeat** fades away. She works out. Blackout.*