

WINDSTORM

by

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CHARACTERS

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross ----- Fifties, small-boned, graying.
Eminent doctor. Swiss.

Eva ----- Young woman, early twenties,
effervescent, outgoing, funny,
dreamy and warm.

(There are three playing areas. DSC are two chairs. A podium is set DSR. USL is a bench with a guitar laying against it.)

(A door slams and ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS enters, carrying a sheaf of papers and a copy of LIFE magazine. She walks deliberately, forcefully, conveying a sense of purpose. She stands at the podium DSR, and looks over the audience.)

ELISABETH

Well. Well, well, well. Not very many, are we? And everyone scattered.

(she motions with her hands)

Come, come, let's everybody move down front.

(beat as her "audience" moves down front)

Good. That's better. Now, we're still empty, but at least we look full.

(She surveys her "students")

I want to first apologize to all of you for my tardiness this morning. You see, as I was walking down the corridor to meet with you here, I saw standing in the hallway, one of our colleagues. A chaplain who works in the hospital. Naturally, I assumed he was on his way here, so I shouted out his name, and waved my arm at him, thinking we could walk together. When he saw who it was who was calling, like he was struck by a thunderbolt, his face drained of all color, he got as pale as a ghost, and he began looking around like this...

(she imitates a person desperately seeking a corner to hide away in)

searching for a corner to duck behind. "What are you doing?" I asked him. "Are you coming?" he shook his head. "Elisabeth ... I can't." I stood there.

Waiting. "Elisabeth ... they've insisted. Surely you've heard. They told me I must make a choice between them and that ... Death and Dying Lady."

(beat)

Heard. Naturally I've heard. It's all you can hear echoing through the corridors like the hot winds blowing through the canyons.

(beat)

Well I'm glad to see there are at least some of you who are not so terrified of a ship everybody else thinks is sinking. But I am very disappointed, very disappointed, that there are so few of you.

(beat)

I asked all of you, everyone of my students, since that interview with Eva was published in Life Magazine and the windstorm has swept in, to really, truly examine your own conscience and to ask yourselves what it is you are doing here in these seminars with our dying patients.

(beat)

I see as I look at you brave few that you are all either seminary students or members of the clergy. This is perhaps most fitting, since it is to four theology students that I owe the birth of my death and dying seminars four years ago when I'd been a doctor at this hospital for only three months. Four young men came to my office because they had heard a lecture I had given on death and dying while I was teaching at the University of Denver. These lovely young people were about to graduate and begin their life's work, and they realized not one of them had ever spent any time with a person who was actually dying. They knew they did not have a clue what to say or how to comfort a person facing his own death.

(beat)

They asked me if they could be with me the next time I interviewed a dying patient. I had no such interview planned, but looking at these four, their faces so filled with their own humility, I knew I must do all I could to help them.

(beat)

It took an entire week to find a physician who would allow such an interview to take place.

(she shakes her head)

Do you see the perfect circle? This week, since the interview with Eva, I have been scouring the wards to find one physician who will allow me to interview his dying patient here in our seminar today. But this time, the boycott against the vulture is complete. This time, the wards are totally closed to me.

(beat)

It doesn't matter. The work will continue. Because it must. It must.

(beat)

Yes, Reverend Carne. I see you have something

absolutely pressing to say. Just one more moment. Always it has been my students and my patients who have supported me. First and last. If this hospital, if these administrators and faculty members will not allow me to bring in patients from the wards, I will bring them in from outside. We can continue to meet here in the hospital or go outside ourselves.

Perhaps we could meet in secret in the dark halls of the basement like the Christians of old who hid in the catacombs. Yes, my dear friend, Reverend Carne. Now I am ready for you. Tell me your thoughts.

(Elisabeth listens)

Wait... wait a moment... Please...you're speaking so fast. My English is not so bad, but remember, still it is not my first tongue.

(she listens again)

You have a family... Yes, I know that you do. I've met your children.

(beat)

You are afraid you will not be able to do your work if you alienate the physicians of this hospital?

(beat)

What? You have come not to continue -- but to say goodbye!

(Pause)

ELISABETH

Is this true? What he is saying?

(beat)

Is this true for all of you?

(beat)

Well.

(beat)

I see.

(beat)

Well.

(beat)

My friends, let me ask you something. What is your work?

(beat)

Are you ministers? Yes. And as ministers, if called upon, would you go to Africa, for instance, to do your missionary work?

(beat)

To the jungles of Africa, even knowing that there is yellow fever, or malaria or what not?

(beat)

Yes, yes, yes. You all shake your heads exuberantly yes. Even with the threat of sickness, even death, you would go, you would stick your necks out to do the work you believed in. Do you believe in what we have been doing here for four years?

(beat)

This is exactly why I warned you last week to examine your conscience. You knew it would get hot,

now it's getting a little bit hot -- as hot as those jungles of Africa, and you're what?

Not sticking your necks out, but taking off?

(beat)

Is there anyone, anyone here at all who can stand up and tell me they no longer believe in that work.

(beat)

No.

(beat)

I am not a theologian -- you know that, not like you, but even I know enough from the Bible to remember Daniel who stood alone in the lions den to fight for what he believed in. And Jesus, who gave up his life for what he knew to be truth.

(beat)

Afraid, Stephen. Yes. I know. You are afraid.

(beat)

But what have we been learning here? Fear is the greatestcrippler of all mankind.

(beat)

One of our chaplains here in the hospital, a good friend of mine, you all know who he is, stopped me in the corridor the other day and told me that as soon as LIFE Magazine hit the stands, the door to his office burst open, and standing there, frantically waving the magazine, his face red and bellowing like a bull, was a member of the faculty. "We've worked for years to make this hospital famous for our excellent cancer care", he shouted." And now this woman comes along and makes us famous for our dying patients."

(beat)

Do you understand what this man is really saying? What is really making him so angry? Fear. They are all so frightened of their own death, they want to ignore death all together. It doesn't happen! It doesn't exist!

(beat)

When the doctor can no longer heal the patient, he drops him like a hot potato. They feel they have failed, they cannot save the patient's life and so they run like the blazes in the other direction. Day after day the patient is left to lie alone in his room, without the touch of a hand, a smile or a single word of encouragement. The doctors and the nurses know how to check the gadgets and write down the vital signs, but they do not know how to make that dying patient feel like the human being he is.

(beat)

This is our work.

(beat)

I have been very lucky to have found some wonderful teachers in my life, but without question my greatest teachers have been my dying patients.

These patients have taught me life's greatest

lesson -- not how to die, but how to live.

(beat)

And this is our work.

(beat)

Do you remember that old woman who came to speak with us only a few months ago. She was alone and dying and filled with pain. Here in our seminar, like a volcano, all the regrets of her life came spilling out. She had spent her life making money, making a good living, getting rich. No time for family or friends, for children. And now, in her final moments, she realized she had never lived. And in the midst of all this deep emptiness and sorrow and utter uselessness, she came to our seminar. And here -- she found meaning. A whole roomful of people listening, questioning, asking please tell us, please help us, please teach us. And that lonely, old, dying lady smiled the most gorgeous smile, and her face lit up like a Christmas tree. "What do I have to tell you?" she said. "Live. Live now. Live for today. Live so that you will never have to look back and say, 'dear, God, how I have wasted my life.'

(beat)

In her dying, that seventy-year old woman lived more than she had all her years before.

(beat)

And this is our work.

(Pause)

ELISABETH

You can't, Patricia. You can't, Kevin. You can't, Phillip. You all say you can't.

(EVA, dressed in a white gown enters USL, She sits at the bench facing US and quietly plays her guitar, singing a folksong, Eidleweiss, softly)

ELISABETH

And I must tell you, I am truly sorry, but at the first sign of heat -- in the face of the windstorm, you collapse.

(beat)

So. Go. You must go.

(beat)

But, please remember this is a landmark decision you have just made in your lives. None of us can escape the windstorms. Each of us gets put through the tumbler that is life, and it is our choice-- and our choice alone -- whether we come out broken, or polished like a jewel.

(Elisabeth watches as her students leave.)

(A moment)

(Eva turns downstage and continues playing. She strikes an unharmonic chord and giggles)

EVA

Oh, oh! What kind of chord was that.

(She corrects the chord)

EVA

Ah. That's better.

(Eva continues playing softly under Elisabeth's lines)

ELISABETH

Ah, Eva.

(Elisabeth still stands at the podium, now gazing out on an empty audience)

ELISABETH

You possess more courage in one small finger than they do in their entire being.

(Elisabeth turns US, freezes. Eva continues playing)

(Eisabeth crosses to where Eva sits and plays on the bench. This is Eva's hospital room. Hearing the music, Elisabeth stops outside the room, listening.)

(Eva sings Eidleweiss. After a moment, Elisabeth joins in. Eva looks up, smiles, and they sing the song together -- Eva helping Elisabeth with some of the words. They sing one or two complete verses and then stop)

ELISABETH

That was lovely. Thank-you.

EVA

Thank-you. It's one of my favorite songs.

ELISABETH

Yah. It's beautiful. It's one of mine, too.

EVA

My father plays it. He plays guitar. He's teaching me.

ELISABETH

Well, he's teaching you very well.

(beat)

I'm Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Would you mind if I came in and visited for awhile?

EVA

I would love to have you visit. My name is Eva, Dr. Ross.

(Elisabeth enters the room, sits on the bench with Eva)

ELISABETH

Eva. What a lovely name.

EVA

Do you like it?

ELISABETH

I have a sister named Eva.

EVA

You do?

ELISABETH

And another one named Erika. We're triplets.

EVA

Triplets! Gosh! That must've been awful! Oh, dear, I mean ...

ELISABETH

You meant just what you said. And you were right. It was awful.

(Eva giggles)

I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.

EVA

That bad, huh?

ELISABETH

Growing up, nobody knew who I was. I never had my own identity, you know what I mean? Sometimes, even my own mother admitted she couldn't tell which was which.

EVA

That's why I always thought it would be so horrible to be a twin -- never mind a triplet. For just that reason.

ELISABETH

Yah, well. You were right. When I was little, it was a great tragedy.

(Eva giggles again)

But now that I'm all grown up -- almost -- I can see where there may be some benefits. And some of the time, it was fun. Like the night I went out with my

sister's boyfriend because she was too sick to go. He was very handsome, and he never knew the difference.

(They laugh together)

EVA

They can be pretty dense sometimes, can't they? Boyfriends. Mine absolutely refuses to believe the reason I'm in here.

ELISABETH

Yah? And what is that reason, Eva?

EVA

The reason I'm here?

ELISABETH

Yah.

EVA

Leukemia. I've had acute leukemia for one week now. Though my boyfriend will tell you it's all a big fat lie.

ELISABETH

And what do you think?

EVA

(pause)

I think I've had leukemia a lot longer than a week.

(Pause. Eva picks up the guitar, strums a few quiet chords)

ELISABETH

Is that when the doctor first diagnosed the leukemia? One week ago?

EVA

Yes.

ELISABETH

That must have been quite a shock.

EVA

It's still a shock. My boyfriend refuses to believe there's anything wrong with me. He keeps telling me, "Don't worry about it." What does that mean? Don't worry about it? That I'm going to magically get better if we just don't think about it? Oh, he makes me so mad! I mean look at what he's doing. Look at all the time he's wasting -- and I may not have all that much time left.

ELISABETH

That's very frustrating.

EVA

It is frustrating. And sad. And sometimes so darn lonely.

ELISABETH

Eva, I want to ask you something. Since you've been in the hospital, have you heard anything about the seminars I conduct here with patients who are very ill, like you?

EVA

You mean the ones where the patients come in and talk about what their feeling?

ELISABETH

Yah. We have nurses who come, physicians, social workers, therapists, ministers, priests, rabbis.

EVA

You're the doctor who runs those seminars?

ELISABETH

Yah. That's me.

EVA

I've heard they're wonderful. The other patients on the ward talk about them. They say you can talk about whatever you want.

ELISABETH

I would like you to come to my seminar and be interviewed as one of the patients.

EVA

Me?

ELISABETH

What do you think?

EVA

I wouldn't know what to say...

ELISABETH

Eva, I think you would have an enormous amount to teach us.

EVA

What could I possibly have to teach people like that?

ELISABETH

(takes her hand)

You can teach us what it is like to be so young and so very pretty and to be fighting leukemia.

EVA

Where would I start?

ELISABETH

By answering my questions.

EVA

You would help me?

ELISABETH

I think, after doing this for four years, I pretty much know the right questions to ask.

EVA

Then, yes. Absolutely, yes. I'd love to come.

ELISABETH

Good. I'm glad. But before you sign on the dotted line, there's something else I need to tell you. This week at our seminar there's going to be a writer and a photographer from LIFE Magazine.

EVA

From LIFE Magazine!

ELISABETH

I think you should take your time, think this over, call your parents ...

EVA

I don't need any time to think anything over. Me in LIFE Magazine. Wow! What'll they say about this back home! Me in Life Magazine. Yes. Oh, yes!

(The women freeze in place. A moment.)

(Eva and Elisabeth cross down to the two chairs, facing out)

EVA

When Dr. Ross asked me if I would like to be interviewed for Life Magazine, I almost jumped up to the ceiling, I was so excited.

(beat, listening to a question)

What? Yes, she asked me if I had any second thoughts -- any at all because, you know, this is a national magazine and all, and I told her absolutely I didn't. Hmmm?

(she giggles)

Yes. She asked me if I would phone my parents and I told her of course I certainly would -- right after the interview.

ELISABETH

She told me, "after all I am twenty-one years old and perfectly capable of making these decisions on my own."

EVA

That's exactly what I said.

(beat)

I wanted to come.

(beat)

I had to.

ELISABETH

Why did you have to, Eva?

EVA

So people will know.

ELISABETH

Know what?

EVA

What it's like. You see people, people don't know what to say. They come to see me, and there's all this silence. And after awhile, some of them stop coming at all. And there'll be hours and hours when I'm all alone in my room, and nobody even stops by to say hello.

ELISABETH

That must get very lonely.

EVA

Oh, you have no idea. I mean, my parents always come. And I do have a boyfriend....

(she waves her hand, showing her engagement ring)

See. We're getting married in June. He's really wonderful.

(beat)

But you see, there are some people here in the hospital, I mean I think sometimes they just don't know what to do with me.

ELISABETH

What do you mean?

EVA

Well, this one time there was this minister -- he was very young -- I mean, he looked even younger than me. And he came into my room with a Bible and asked if he could sit and talk for awhile. Well, I really love having visitors, it sure beats sitting alone staring at the walls, so I said sure. So he came in, but he didn't want to talk. He just wanted to read me passages from the Bible.

ELISABETH

I see.

EVA

Not that I have anything against the Bible. When I

was little, I always believed in God, but now, I don't know. I'm not too sure. Sometimes, I think maybe I don't. But then, when I start having those kinds of thoughts, I kind of look up and say "Hey, don't take me seriously. I'm just kidding, you know. If you're there."

ELISABETH

So this young minister who didn't want to talk, this bothered you?

EVA

Yes, it bothered me. I mean, I know how to read. I can read the Bible if I want to. He came in, and just stuck his nose in a book. And then there's these other people who work here who either avoid me altogether or act like ...

ELISABETH

Act like what?

EVA

Well, for instance, when I talk to them, I talk like I'm going to be around ten years from now, and they ... well, they don't seem to, you know, want to cheer me on ...

ELISABETH

What do you mean, "cheer you on"?

EVA

Well, it's like the doctor who first told me I had leukemia? He told me this story right after he told me about the leukemia. It was about a movie he'd seen where there was this tank, and it was coming and coming right after this man, but just as the tank was about to roll over him, the man jumped into a narrow ditch and saved his life. He told me that's what I have to do. I have to play the odds. No matter how small they seem. The percentage of people who live with leukemia -- well, it's not even a percentage, it's a fraction of a percentage -- but I could be one of those fractions and go on and on for years. Those are my odds. That's what I have to play. And that's cheering me on.

ELISABETH

And that hope, that's important to you?

EVA

That hope is everything to me. There was this other doctor, and right away he told me that the average is maybe two or three years. When he said that, that sort of disappointed me. But then my friends will call and say they heard this story on the news or something where there was a breakthrough and that makes me real happy. Look -- if one hundred people

come in and tell me that they know somebody who died after one year, and one person comes in and tells me they know somebody who made it for ten -- that one person can erase all the hundred others.

ELISABETH

It sounds as though you have some really good friends.

EVA

Some.

ELISABETH

Some?

EVA

I used to have more. But they're the ones that don't come anymore.

(beat)

They can't. I understand. They're afraid. I know. And yet -- it makes me feel so bad.

(her eyes well with tears, Elisabeth takes her hand)

Like my boyfriend? I mean, I know he loves me. We're getting married. We're going to have children. But ... he hasn't been to the hospital to see me. I haven't ... I haven't even heard from him.

ELISABETH

How long has that been?

EVA

Since I've been here. Two weeks now.

(beat)

He's afraid. I know. I mean, when they first diagnosed me he refused to believe there was anything wrong with me. He was convinced they had just made a big mistake. But now, he knows that's not true, and I know he's thinking, I mean, what if we do get married and have children right away and then she dies.

(she looks directly at Elisabeth)

I know what I'm going to have to do.

ELISABETH

Yah?

EVA

I'm going to have to call him. The dunderhead. And I know just what I'm going to say.

ELISABETH

What?

EVA

I'm going to tell him, "Look, I know how you feel. You're worried about kids. So? We weren't planning

on having on kids right away, anyway. I mean that isn't real smart no matter who you're marrying! So look. Let's just get married. After five years or so, then we can talk about starting a family."

ELISABETH

That's a very smart plan.

EVA

I mean, after all, we both still need to graduate from college first anyway. My parents would not be very happy with me if I had a baby before I graduated from college.

ELISABETH

Your parents sound very wise.

EVA

Oh, my parents are really terrific.
(she looks at Elisabeth a moment and giggles)
They're just like you!

ELISABETH

Like me!

EVA

Yes! They sound just like you. They're from Europe, too. My father is this big guy, strong and stout, like a bear, but he's so gentle and kind. And my mother -- she's little -- like you are, and so beautiful. You know they come to see me everyday. And they stay as long as the hospital lets them. We laugh and talk and sing together.

(Eva begins singing Eidleweiss.
Elisabeth joins in. They sing together
for several verses, but suddenly, Eva
stops singing)

ELISABETH

Eva ...?

(Eva rises, moves away)

ELISABETH

Eva...?

EVA

I'm all right. It's just ...

ELISABETH

Just what, Eva?

EVA

I know how much they love me.
(her tears threaten)
Sometimes ... sometimes ... it just hurts so much to

look at them.

(The tears spill. Elisabeth hugs her tightly)

ELISABETH

It must be very hard.

EVA

Oh, God, yes! It's hard.

ELISABETH

Yes. It must be.

(Elisabeth still holding Eva, smiles. Eva smiles back)

ELISABETH

You need a kleenex?

EVA

Yes.

(Elisabeth rummages through her pockets, and pulls out a crumpled kleenex)

ELISABETH

It's all crumpled. But it's clean.

(beat)

I think.

(They laugh. Eva blows her nose, then looks out to the interviewer)

EVA

Oh, please don't take a picture of me with a big red nose like this!

(beat, to Elisabeth)

There's nothing I can do to stop their pain, is there?

ELISABETH

No.

EVA

Sometimes, when they come to my room, we don't laugh or sing. Sometimes, we don't even talk. Sometimes, we just sit there, all three of us, quietly, and hold hands.

ELISABETH

Eva, what can we do? The people here, in the hospital. What can we do that would help you the most?

EVA

Come in and talk to me. Don't be afraid. Come in and cheer me on. Tell me about someone who wasn't supposed to make it, and did.

(beat)

I had this roommate here for awhile. This lady. She had breast cancer. She used to sit around and cry all the time. She was always asking the doctors if she was going to make it. Every day I heard them tell her that she was. They told her they removed all the cancer and her chances for a perfectly normal life were excellent. I sympathized with her, because I knew this was a really big blow to her.

(beat)

But, I mean, every day, she'd cry -- even three days after they told her she'd live to be one hundred, she was still crying. I couldn't take that. That was the one time I really got depressed. I ran out into the hall and cried. Nobody understood.

The nurses told me, "Well, she's going through this big psychological thing." Well, what about me? I mean, no one's coming in here and telling me I have even a fifty-fifty chance.

(beat)

I thought, you know, "I'll give her my breasts." I want to live. I'm here and I'm alive and I want to keep on living day after day for as long as I can. I want to live.

(Eva and Elisabeth hug.)

ELISABETH

(to photographer)

Another picture?

(to Eva)

Okay?

(Eva nods. Eva and Elisabeth pose for the picture. Freeze)

(Eva returns to the bench, facing US. Elisabeth moves back to her podium, looking out over what is now row upon row of empty seats.)

ELISABETH

More courage in the speck of your eye than they will know in a hundred lifetimes. Ach!

(She picks up her papers and the magazine, and turns to leave. A sheaf of letters cascades to the floor. Elisabeth stops, bends down to gather up the letters. She sees one, picks it up and opens it)

ELISABETH

(reading)

To the Vulture who hovers over the dying and exploits the emotions of the gravely ill.

(stops reading)

Oh, dear God, they don't understand. After all this time and all my work, and still, they don't understand. Why am I doing this?

(Elsiabeth sits in the chair next to the podium, the letters still scattered at her feet)

ELISABETH

Time after time I stick my neck out only to get it chopped right off.

(beat)

I should grow a garden with vegetables. And adopt babies.

(Her eyes fill with tears)

ELISABETH

I don't have the strength.

(Elsiabeth sits silently, her head dropped into her hands)

(Softly, Eva, still facing US begins playing and singing Edleweiss)

(Elisabeth looks up, looks at all the letters)

ELISABETH

Letters and letters and more letters.

(Eva continues singing. Elisabeth picks up a few letters)

ELISABETH

Let's see what other creative insults they can come up with.

ELISABETH

(she opens a letter, reads)

Dear Dr. Ross. I have just finished reading the interview with Eva in LIFE magazine.

(beat)

It was the most beautiful thing I have ever read.

(Elisabeth reacts to the positive words)

I am recently widowed, and Eva's beauty and integrity not only touched me deeply, but have given me the courage to carry on. Thank-you, Eva. Thank-you, Dr. Ross.

(Eva giggles, and turns on the bench, facing out)

(Elisabeth picks up another letter)

ELISABETH

(reading)

Dear Dr. Ross. I am twelve years old and dying.
Yesterday my Mom and me read the article about Eva
in LIFE together.

It was the first time she could understand what I've
been trying to tell her. Dr. Ross, I don't have to
pretend with her anymore, and she doesn't have to
pretend with me.

(Eva sets her guitar down, and picks up
a copy of LIFE magazine)

ELISABETH

(reading)

When I read the LIFE article, I saw myself as a
young child, standing on the side of a pool, and
hearing a veteran swimmer in the deep end shouting,
"Jump in. It's not so bad. Jump in and learn to
swim!"

(Eva speaks as if Elisabeth were in the
room with her)

EVA

Oh, gosh! That's not a very good picture of me, is
it?

(Elisabeth, though still at the podium,
turns to face Eva)

ELISABETH

It's a beautiful picture of you, Eva.

EVA

The story -- it's good, isn't it?

(beat)

Thank-you, Dr. Ross.

ELISABETH

Thank-you, Eva.

(Eva picks up her guitar and her copy
of LIFE Magazine and exits. Elisabeth
watches her go)

ELISABETH

Windstorms.

(beat)

Oh, yes, the work will continue. And they can call
me that death and dying woman, or vulture or
whatever they want because it is only this ...

(she grabs up the letters)

Only this that matters.

(Elisabeth smiles, refreshed and renewed)

ELISABETH

Should you shield the canyons from the windstorms,
you would never see the beauty of their carvings.

(She looks at her copy of LIFE Magazine)

ELISABETH

God bless you, Eva. God bless.

(Lights fade)

(End of play)