

STAR TRAIN
By Susan Merson

CAST:

EDWIN JEFFERSON, 60's, a dapper little man, songwriter
JUDITH COREY, late 20's, recently widowed mother of three
PORTER,

TIME: 1953

SETTING; The back of a moving train at twilight, summer.

FOR JAKE DENGEL

STAR TRAIN

THE BACK PLATFORM OF A MOVING TRAIN. SUMMER 1953. THE TRAIN RATTLES. THE SKY IS MIDNIGHT BLUE, STREAKED WITH WISPS OF A DYING SUNSET.

JUDITH COREY, LATE 20'S, SMOKES AND INHALES DEEPLY. THE MOONLIGHT STRIKES HER, BLOWS HER HAIR. SHE LEANS FORWARD TO FIND THE FIRST STAR

THE PORTER PASSES FROM CAR TO CAR.

PORTER

Careful, ma'am. This train is going at a pretty fair clip.

JUDY

Trying to get a look at the evening star.

PORTER

Make the right wish, your dream'll come true. That's for sure.

JUDY

That so?

PORTER

That's what they tell me.

JUDY STUBS OUT HER SMOKE. IT WAS AFFECTATIONANYWAY.

PORTER

Care for an evening paper, ma'am. Picked 'em up at the last stop.

JUDY

Haven't read a paper since we started the trip! Truman still in office?

PORTER

Well, actually ma'am. No., We got ourselves a new one in January. Ike. You like Ike?

JUDY

Should I like Ike?

PORTER

Well, that remains to be seen now, ma'am. That fella McCarthy is still all over the headlines.

JUDY

That so?

PORTER

'Fraid so.

JUDY

Well, I'd much rather think about the heavens than any Communist's in the closet. Half through the century it seems we need a few more answers than we can find in that evening paper.

PORTER

Know what you mean, ma'am. Hope you're enjoying the trip.

JUDY

The children are looking forward to the morning!

PORTER

Cheyenne, Wyoming!

JUDY

The only way I could get them to sleep was to convince them they'd see real cowboys and Indians when they woke up.

PORTER

There's a tomahawk shop in the station. Genuine articles they say.

JUDY

Oh! Maybe they'll sleep through.

PORTER

You have a good evening now, ma'am, (tips his hat) I'll check on the kids as I go.

JUDY

Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

PORTER

Porter Number 12, ma'am. At your service till journey's end.

THE PORTER EXITS AFTER HAVING
PUT IN A PLUG FOR HIS TIP.

ED JEFFERSON, 60's, ENTERS FOR A
SMOKE. DAPPER IN A BLUE BLAZER
AND CRAVAT. EYES TWINKLE,
FURTIVE SMILE TEASES HIS NEAT
MOUSTACHE. HE ASSESSES THE
LANDSCAPE AND TRIES NOT TO
CHAT BUT HE'S NERVOUS
PRETENDING SHE'S NOT THERE.

ED

Mind if I stand here? It's pretty stuffy in that car. I thought I'd like a smoke. (NO
RESPONSE) Perhaps some poetry by twilight.

JUDY

Be my guest. (BEAT) Feel free to sit.

ED

No, no. I'll stand. Easier to declaim that way.

ED SMILES. JUDY STUDIES THE SKY.

ED

Pretty evening.

JUDY

There it is! (She whispers) Starlight, star bright, first star I see tonight. Wish I may, wish
I might, Have a wish I wish tonight.

ED WATCHES HER INTENSITY.

ED

It must be mighty important. Whatever it is.

JUDY

Me and the night sky have a bargain. We're re-establishing the terms.

ED

Oh.

BEAT. THEN, ED BEGINS TO WHISTLE
'STARDUST'. IT TRAILS AWAY. THEN.

ED

My mother always loved the night, too, Taught me never to be afraid of the dark.

JUDY

A useful lesson.

ED

It's good you're resting.

JUDY LOOKS UP

Couldn't help but notice you and your, uh—active—family.

JUDY

Oh, well, the children are kind of hard to contain sometimes. I hope they haven't been too much of a bother.

ED

They seem to be having a grand time. Running up and down the aisles. Snatching tickets!

JUDY

They're not! What happened?

ED

Oh, it's all sorted out. A few black eyes. Children in chains, no problem really...

JUDY

I beg your pardon?

ED LAUGHS

ED

Not to worry! Just teasing!

JUDY

I certainly hope they're not driving everybody crazy.

ED

Oh no! I was just joking! Really! Really!

JUDY

I do my best to entertain them, but...

ED

You seem a fine mother.

JUDY

It takes just about all of my energy.

ED

One must be vigorous, athletic..

JUDY

Oh, I'm sorry if they've...

ED

They're charming. Just fine. So are you.

JUDY

I apologize... I

ED

How old are they?

JUDY

Linda is 10, David is 7 and then little one is 3.

ED

A handful.

JUDY

Yes. A handful.

ED

I admire your skill, truly.

JUDY

You have children?

ED

Me? Oh no. I'm not married. But I come from a brood of six. Mother was the ringmaster, wrestler and judge all in one.

JUDY

Six! I can't imagine.

ED

Haven't seen them in years. Bit of a black sheep I'm afraid.

JUDY

That's too bad.

ED

Depends on how you look at it.

JUDY

You're a professional man?

ED

A writer.

JUDY

Really? How exciting!

ED

Some may agree.

JUDY

You live in California?

ED

I write songs for the movies. Happy, sad or sassy, as what fits the occasion.

JUDY

On vacation?

ED

I'm heading back east. Family business. My mother passed. She passed yesterday morning. I'm returning home for the funeral.

JUDY

Oh. I'm sorry. I'm sure she was a wonderful woman.

ED

Yes. I'm certain she was.

THE LONG LOW WHISTLE OF THE
TRAIN. ED WHISTLES ALONG WITH
IT.

JUDY

That's good! (She looks at him) Songs? Never met a person who write songs before. Somehow I thought they'd be a bit more...

ED

What?

JUDY

Um...serious, I guess. Like those longhaired types. Stokowski, Toscanini...

ED

Oh. I have very serious peacock moments! You should see me screech and shake my feathers. It's very serious business.

JUDY

Really?

ED

Yes. But rarely in company. There are certain things a man should be done behind closed doors. How about you? What do you do?

JUDY

Oh, I'm a mother actually. A full time wife and mother.

ED

Yes?

JUDY

Yes. But my husband passed along April of this year.

ED

Ah.

JUDY

He always loved California, or the idea of it. He never really lived there. Just passed through when he left the army. It was always a dream of his to live out there, so, when he died, I took the insurance money, and put the kids on the El Capitan and came out to look at the palm trees.

ED

Disappointed?

JUDY

Well, we got there but.. It's time to go home now. I just can't imagine how anyone can work with all those palm trees! I mean, it's like a desert fantasy or something! So beautiful! So many flowers! And the ocean! A lot to take in by yourself.

ED

Yes. All that sunshine can addle the brain.

JUDY

I have to get a job. The kids have to get ready for school. I have to stop wishing...

ED

I'm sure you miss him very much.

JUDY

It's just that all the kids got sun burnt I in the pool and my hands were full of Noxzema and then the little one wandered out into the parking lot. I was all by myself and she almost got killed! I didn't know what to do! And the driver of the car, he yelled at me! I just... It 's that...

SHE STOPS. OVERWHELMED DESPITE
HER BEST EFFORTS

It's so...

ED

Yes. Well, I do understand.

JUDY

I apologize. Really.

ED

No. Quite understandable. How long were you married?

JUDY

Ten. No, eleven, almost eleven years.

ED

Ah.

JUDY

I'm not really used to this new condition as you can see. My parents have been gone for quite a while so Jim was it.

ED

I'm sure you loved him very much.

JUDY

Yes, you said that.

ED

Did I? (He takes a beat) Excuse me. I didn't mean to disturb you.

HE STARTS TO GO.

JUDY

No. Please stay. We don't have to talk. It's so awkward to talk. Just stay. Please.

SHE CLOSSES HER EYES. THE BREEZE
HITS HER FACE.

Oh, the night breeze.

ED

It's just that I don't want to be a bother.

JUDY

Please.

ED DECIDES IT'S ALL RIGHT AND
THEN SITS, CAREFUL NOT TO
CREASE HIS TROUSERS.

ED

I haven't seen my family in twenty-three years.

JUDY

That's a long time.

ED

It was the Depression.

JUDY

You haven't seen your mother in all that time?

ED

I've spoken with her. Sent her gifts. I actually did see her a few years ago. She met me in a diner between trains just after the war. We had lunch. A two-handkerchief lunch.

JUDY

Did you serve?

ED (joking)

Lunch?

JUDY (giggling)

No! In the war. Did you serve in the war?

ED

Oh yes. USO. Stateside unit.

JUDY

Oh! And no girlfriends from the Hollywood Canteen? No children? A handsome gentleman like you?

ED

Thank you for the compliment.

JUDY

Well, I mean it. A man needs a family.

ED

I have friends. My best friend—George—and I have been friends for almost ten years. He is my family. A family by definition is that person or persons with whom one can stomach morning coffee. That is family.

JUDY

Does he make music, too?

ED

He's an animator. Works on cartoons. Bambi. That sort of thing.

JUDY

Well, I'm sure the kids would love him.

ED

Gets more fan mail than Judy Garland.

JUDY

You mother must have missed you so far away. And your father.

ED

My father was not interested in me in the least. It was his suggestion that I leave as a matter of fact.

JUDY

Oh, I'm sure he...

ED

I was my mother's child, but she was her husband's wife.

JUDY

Mothers are hard pressed to know what...

ED

I threw in my lot with Mother but she never did win an argument. And let's say I didn't exactly follow in my father's footsteps. Now she's gone, the old man is left with all his identical offspring. So much for betting the odds. And the peacock prodigal son returns. It may not be the easiest of homecomings.

JUDY

I'd think they'd all be proud.

ED

Yes, well. Father thought fatherhood the best vocation, though I don't think anyone ever sent him any awards on that score. And fatherhood was something that escaped me.

JUDY

Oh, kids...

ED (smiles)

One fashions one's own fancy after all. One must take it in your hands and shape it just how it comes to you.'

JUDY HEARS THIS. THEY FALL STILL.
FEEL THE DARK COOLNESS ON THEIR
FACES. ED BREATHES DEEP.

ED

What a pleasant smell. Odd, I should remember...

JUDY

White Shoulders for birthdays. Lily of the Valley for Christmas.

ED

When I would sit close to her. And she would spray her stole with something. Light and airy. Uncharacteristic. I sent her something years ago but nothing since.

JUDY

Jasmine?

My father gave me a bottle for a wedding gift. Said all good men love an elegant fragrance on the woman they love. Said he learned that in Paris.

ED

He was quite right.

JUDY

I used to wear it only for special occasions. I'm not going to do that anymore.

ED

Oh, yes, I quite agree,.

JUDY

I've been wearing jasmine every day since Jim's been gone.

ED

Quite right and the luckier for me.

JUDY

My dad died in Italy in '44. He was never very good on advice but he knew how to make a woman feel special. My mom was crazy about him. He was a flyer.

ED

I'm sorry he never had the chance to have this chat with you.

JUDY

He never knew me.

ED

Fathers with daughters are flattered fellows. But, looks like I'm the lucky one this evening.

JUDY

No luckier than your friend George over morning coffee,

ED

Ah , George. Too bad he's never sported pigtails or dressed for the school prom.

JUDY

What will you say to your family?

ED

As little as possible. Try to be civil over the silver, that kind of thing.
(beat) It's really time for me to go in. Coming, lovely Miss...?

JUDY

Judith. Judith Mitchell Corey.

ED

I'm Edward Jefferson. Coming, Mrs. Corey?

JUDY

No. I don't think so. The sky...

ED

You have an assignation?

JUDY

I beg your pardon?

1/30/06

ED

You wish on stars often?

JUDY

My dad was an aviator. Flew night missions over an enemy territory. Jim knew stars.

ED

I know the night sky. There's Cassiopeia, and there you see Orion? The North Star. Big Dipper..

JUDY

Where?

ED

There. Right there is the dipper. Make a wish. Go on.

JUDY CLOSSES HER EYES AND
ED BEGINS TO SING SOFTLY.

ED (sings)

When you wish upon a star
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires
Will come to you,

(He speaks) You know the song? You can sing with me.

(Sings) If your heart is

BOTH (sing)

...in your dreams.
No request is too extreme.
When you wish upon a star
As dreamers do.

THERE IS A MOMENT OF
QUIET. JUDY OPENS HER EYES
AND REALIZES SHE HAS LET
HER HEAD FALL ONTO THIS
STRANGERS SHOULDER.
SHE SITS UP. SHE STANDS.

1/30/06

JUDY

My goodness. (embarrassed laugh) My stars.

SHE LOOKS UP AT THE
HEAVENS.

I'm going in now.

ED DOFFS HIS HAT. JUDY
SMILES, PORTER RE-ENTERS.

PORTER

Evening, ma'am, Checked on your little ones. All quiet on that front. Evening
compartments all prepared.

JUDY

Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

PORTER EXITS. JUDY SMILES
AT ED. HE SERENADES HER

ED (sing alone)

Fate is kind. It brings to those who love.
The sweet fulfillment of
Their secret longing.

JUDY (maybe a little embarrassed)

Good night now.

JUDY GOES. ED TURNS AND
LOOKS OUT AT THE NIGHT ALL
ALONE.

ED (sings)

Like a bolt out of the blue,
Fate steps in and sees you through.
When you wish upon a star
Your dreams come true.

ED

Ah. (HE SPOTS HIS STAR) I wish...

...

END OF PLAY

OLD ENDING/REFERENCE

ED

You wish on stars often?

JUDY

My dad was an aviator. Flew night missions over an enemy territory. Jim knew stars.

ED

I know the night sky. There's Cassiopeia, and there you see Orion? The North Star. Big Dipper..

JUDY

Where?

ED

There. Right there is the dipper. Make a wish. Go on.

JUDY CLOSSES HER EYES AND
ED BEGINS TO SING SOFTLY.

ED (sings)

When you wish upon a star
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires
Will come to you,

(He speaks) You know the song? You can sing with me.

(Sings) If your heart is

BOTH (sing)

...in your dreams.
No request is too extreme.
When you wish upon a star
As dreamers do.

ED (sing alone)

Fate is kind. It brings to those who love.
The sweet fulfillment of
Their secret longing.
Like a bolt out of the blue,
Fate steps in and sees you through.
OLD ENDING/REFERENCE

When you wish upon a star
Your dreams come true.

JUDY HAS CLOSED HER EYES, SHE IS
RESTING QUIETLY, HER HEAD ON HIS
SHOULDER. ED SITS QUIETLY, LOOKS
OUT AT THE NIGHT, THEN
REMEMBERS TO SAY...

ED

Ah. I wish...

END OF PLAY

STAR TRAIN
By Susan Merson

Susan Merson
817 North Citrus Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90038
323 467 6992
sofismom @aol.com,
www.susanmerson.com