

## Remembering the Sky

*(based on the song "I Remember Sky" by Stephen Sondheim)*

### ACT I:

**Scene 1:** *A spaceship cabin. The outer bulkheads are curved. There is a window set in one wall, that matches the curve of the bulkhead. Outside is the blackness of space. Inside, everything is cozy, soft, brightly colored, warmly lit.*

*Mother/Kate and Daughter/Tressa are on opposite ends of a futon-style sofa, each with a digital tablet – ipad version 7000, or whatever.*

Mother (singing):

I remember sky.  
It was blue as ink  
Or at least I think  
I remember sky

Daughter:

Mother, are you feeling alright? The sky is black. It's been black my entire life. Except that time the ship was in a nebula. Then it was white and pale blue and pink, but it never looked like ink... what's ink anyway?

Mother:

In the before times, when we lived on Earth and not on this WorldShip, we would write on sheets of paper – flattened processed wood pulp –

Daughter (incredulous):

Wood... like from trees.

Mother:

Yes, from trees, and we would use pens – hollow tubes filled with a liquid pigment called ink. It came in a lot of colors, but blue was very common.

Daughter:

That seems very wasteful. And slow. Teacher showed us how to write with a stylus and a wipable flimsy, and my letters got all smeary, and it took ages to make a single sentence. It's even slower than keyboarding.

Mother:

My letters used to get 'all smeary' sometimes, too. And if the ink was wet, sometimes it would get on my hands. I didn't mind. I liked seeing the loops and lines of the words I wrote. I filled notebook after notebook with my innermost secrets.

Daughter:

Like a personal log?

Mother:

Very much like a personal log, but not one that would ever be archived for later study.

Daughter:

What's the point of writing things no one else will read?

*Fade to black.*

**Scene 2:** *A different cabin – slightly different décor. SON is shaking a snowglobe.*

Son:

Did you really have different seasons when you were my age? Summer and Fall and Spring and Winter?

Father:

Summer was my favorite. No school for three months, warm sunshine. We'd go to the beach and surf in the ocean, or build castles out of sand. But winter... winter could be fun, too. We built things out of snow, then, or had snowball fights, and when we were so cold our fingertips were numb and our lips were trembling, we'd go inside and drink hot chocolate.

Son:

Three months without school? Did you forget everything you learned?

Father:

Sometimes we had to be reminded, but the truth is, we had other kinds of learning, not just what a Teacher laid out for us. Your grandfather taught me to catch fish, and clean and cook them, and your grandmother taught me how to bake bread.

Son:

That doesn't sound very efficient. Replicators are less messy and less wasteful.

Father:

Mm. So they are, but food tasted better, then. And no recreational program can beat the feeling of falling snow getting into your eyes and hair. It was annoying, but it was also magical.

(He sings)

I remember snow  
Soft as feathers  
Sharp as thumb tacks  
Coming down like lint

And it made you squint  
When the wind would blow...

*Fade to black.*

**Scene 3:** *Mother and Daughter, Father and Son are in what appears to be a cafeteria or mess. There are potted trees, lots of benches and tables, and huge windows where the void of space is punctuated by the pinprick light from passing stars.*

*Father and Son are seated at a table, each with a tray of food. Mother and Daughter enter, head to replicator banks and get their own trays.*

Mother (singing):

And ice like vinyl  
On the streets  
Cold as silver  
White as sheets  
Rain like strings  
And changing things  
Like leaves

Daughter:

Look, there's Davan and his father. Let's go sit with them.

Mother:

Alright.

*The two head to where Father and Son are seated.*

Son (Davan):

Tressa! Come sit with us! Father has been telling me about seasons.

Tressa (Daughter) and her mother join the others at their table.

Tressa (Daughter):

Have you noticed that our parents are suddenly on some big nostalgia-fest. "I remember this. I remember that."

Father (to Mother – singing):

And ice like vinyl  
On the streets  
Cold as silver  
White as sheets  
Rain like strings  
And changing things  
Like leaves

Can you imagine, Kate? Our children have never seen snow, or grass, or leaves.

Kate (Mother):

Have we failed them, Mark? Coming on the WorldShip was supposed to give us all a chance at a better life, but the farther we get from Earth, without being anywhere near a new planet, I feel like we're depriving them of normal lives.

Mark (Father):

What's normal. When our parents were kids it was normal to be sent outside to play without supervision, as long as they were home by the time the streetlights came on. When we were kids, normal was being tethered to a cellphone so our parents knew who we were with, what we were doing, and where we were doing it, and our outside time was had only in structured allotments. For our children, living in space, seeing the light of infinite suns, that *is* normal. And when we make Landfall, our kids will adapt to a new normal.

Kate:

Or their kids will. You know there's no guarantee we're make it in time.

Mark:

I think we have to have faith.

Kate:

I didn't know you were one of those.

Mark:

One of... what? A religious fanatic. I'm not. I don't mean faith in a god. I mean faith that our technology, knowledge, and skills have set us on the right path to a successful Landfall.

*A chime sounds.*

Computer Voice:

Mealtime has concluded. Please report to your designated wellness areas for your wellbeing sessions.

Mark:

I'm meeting a few of the other parents in the arboretum for walking and oxygenation. Join us?

Kate:

Maybe another time. I promised Sophie and Leon I'd lead a yoga session on the observation deck.

Mark:

Davan, what's your wellbeing assignment?

Tressa

(to Mark) We're both going to zero-gee dodgeball. (to Davan) I'm totally gonna cream you this time.

Davan:

No way, I have mad zero-gee skills. (beat) Race you!

Tressa and Davan get up from the table, and race from the room.

Mark:

I enjoyed our chat. Perhaps we can share a meal again sometime.

Kate:

I'd like that. It's hard being a single parent but being a single parent in space is worse.

Mark:

This is true.

*The pair leave the table and continue chatting as the lights fade out and they exit.*

## Act II – 15 Years Later

**Scene 1:** *The ship's arboretum. Potted trees and hanging plants are everywhere, and there are benches interspersed throughout. Kate, and Mark, now visibly older, are sharing a bench. Tressa, and Davan - now adults – share another. There are a few very small children seated on a blanket, and other adults of various ages are also present.*

*A chime sounds.*

Computer Voice:

The town meeting has begun. Please listen to this message from command:

*A video screen is lowered and the message plays thereupon.*

Mission Commander:

Citizens of *Artemis*, congratulations. We are approaching Landfall. Over the next thirty days, we will be holding skills assessments and orientations for our arrival at Planet 40771701. Please be attentive and cooperative. Our voyage may be ending, but our journey is just beginning.

Computer Voice:

Your SAO assignments will be sent to your shipboard mail accounts. Please watch for them. This meeting is now concluded.

*Blackout*

**Scene 2:** *The Artemis's landing site on the new planet. Its ramp descends at stage right, and people start to exit. As they arrive on the ground, the lights come up to reveal a grassy plain with a stream.*

Kate:

I didn't realize your first steps on real grass would be when you were twenty-seven years old, Tressa. But I'm glad you finally get to breathe fresh air.

Tressa:

It's so big... there's aren't any bulkheads. Is this safe?

*Davan joins them, wrapping his arm around Tressa.*

Tressa:

How's your father?

Davan:

He was awake today, so that's good. He's the last person I expected to come down with the sickness, but the medstaff says he was genetically predisposed. There's hope that once we set up the labs here, the flora will contain the right elements for a cure.

Tressa:

But that won't be for months.

Davan

I know. (breathes in) Look, Tress! The sky is blue. Blue! Did you ever imagine.

Tressa:

I never did. But Mom – you used to sing about it...

Davan:

Dad did too, I think. Something about vinyl leaves.

Kate:

It was ice like vinyl.

(she sings)

I remember leaves  
Green as spearmint  
Crisp as paper  
I remember trees  
Bare as coat racks  
Spread like broken umbrellas  
And parks and bridges  
Ponds and zoos  
Ruddy faces  
Muddy shoes  
And light and noise and  
Bees and boys  
And days....

*The lights turns to sunset, then fades to a starry sky, then blackness.*

**Scene 3:** *The same grassy plain, but there are pre-fab buildings in the distance, and the sun is just rising. DAVAN and MARK are watching the sunrise. MARK is in a wheelchair.*

Davan:

Look, Dad, the sun is coming up. The zoologists say there are birds in the trees beyond the stream, and they're about to move the horses and cows out of the hold and into pasture. You made it... you made it - there's real sky out there.

Mark:

You're acting like this will be my last sunrise, kiddo. The medstaff says I'll live another ten or fifteen years at least.

Davan:

It's not your last sunrise, Dad. It's your first.

Mark:

We've been here for a month...

Davan:

No, I meant, it's your first as a grandfather. Tressa and I were approved for family expansion two months before landfall. She's pregnant.

Mark:

Your child will grow up with grass and sky...

Davan:

Because of you, Dad.

Mark:

I can die happy now... well... ten or fifteen years from now.

Sunrise turns into bright light, then fades to black.

Scene 4: Ten years later. Davan and Tressa are older. Kate is an elderly woman. Missy is ten. They are gathered around a sapling tree, and Davan is carrying a headstone.

Missy:

I don't understand why were naming a tree with a plaque.

Tressa:

It's not a plaque. It's a gravestone. It commemorates where someone has been buried.

Missy:

But Granfa's not buried here, we cremated him.

Kate:

We buried his ashes when we planted the tree, darling-girl. They'll help it grow.

Davan:

The stone is to remind us, that Dad - your Granfa - was here, that he made it back to the sky.

Tressa:

He would appreciate the tree. And the stone, I think.

Davan:

I keep thinking of that song...

Kate (sings, thinly):

I remember sky...

*The four people bow their heads, as Mark's voice echoes around them, in full voice with orchestral accompaniment.*

Mark (singing):

I remember days  
Or at least I try  
But as years go by  
They're a sort of haze  
And the bluest ink  
Isn't really sky  
And at times I think  
I would gladly die  
For a day of sky

*Fade to black  
Curtain.*



