

THE MOUSE on FLIGHT #121

- A one-act by Daniel Curzon

CHARACTERS: (4)

COREY, male, part-time care-giver of his father, likeable, any adult age

FATHER, male, failing mentally, old enough to be Corey's father

OTHER PASSENGER, male or female, unempathetic, any age

FLIGHT ATTENDANT, male or female, brusque, any age

SETTING: An airplane: use two chairs slightly separated; also sometimes a separate space for the Father, who appears at different locations around the theater, with his own lighting.

LIGHTS UP

(Corey comes down aisle from the back with just a backpack.)

COREY: (smiling, to Other) Hello!

OTHER: (no reply, no smile, but turns legs to permit Corey to sit in the other seat)

COREY: (after sitting in the inside seat, stows a backpack under seat) Nice day!

OTHER: (no reply, reads magazine)

COREY: At least we have a free seat between us.

OTHER: (turns away slightly)

COREY: (resigned) *Okay!* (looks back, stands up, looks again) Hmm. (Waves at Flight Attendant)

ATTENDANT: (coming to Corey) Yes, sir, can I help you?

COREY: It's my father. We couldn't get seats together. I'm looking to see if he's all right.

ATTENDANT: Do you know his seat number?

COREY: I think it's 11-A. He's an elderly gentleman with a bald spot on top, near the back of his head. He's very sweet. Doesn't say much anymore. A bit of dementia. And he –

ATTENDANT: I see. (Leaves to check 11-A.)

COREY: (still standing, still looking) (to Other) I'm sorry. I have to check on my dad.

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OTHER: (does not answer)

COREY: He's gotten quite feeble in the past few months. But he used to be quite . . .

(The Flight Attendant returns.)

ATTENDANT: I don't see an elderly gentleman in 11-A. Are you sure it's that seat number?

COREY: Pretty sure. I have his boarding pass. With mine. (Takes it out of a pocket and shows Attendant.)

ATTENDANT: (glancing at it) I also checked the nearby seats but didn't see anybody of that description.

COREY: He's shrunk a lot. He's wearing a green woolen sweater. Because he gets cold now.

ATTENDANT: (coldly) I can look again, if necessary.

COREY: Maybe he's in the restroom. He got confused the last time we flew and couldn't unlock the door and was locked in.

ATTENDANT: And what happened – somebody had to break it down?!

COREY: No, he finally figured it out. He used to be quite brilliant.

ATTENDANT: I'll check the toilets. (Leaves.)

COREY: (to Other) He's probably fine. Just scares us sometimes. Especially my sister and her husband, when he stays with them.

OTHER: (no response)

COREY: Maybe I'd better sit down. I'm disturbing you. (Sits down.)

ATTENDANT: (coming by) Please fasten your seat belts. We are about to take off. (to an unseen row) Please fasten your seat belts. We are about to take off.)

COREY: Excuse me. Excuse me!

ATTENDANT: (returning) Yes?

COREY: Did you have a chance to check the restrooms?

ATTENDANT: Check the restrooms?

COREY: For my father.

ATTENDANT: The elderly gentleman in the orange sweater.

COREY: Green woolen.

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ATTENDANT: I did see that someone is in one of the toilets. They should be out before we take off.

COREY: Should I go down there and see if -- ?

ATTENDANT: It's best if we don't have *two* people who aren't seated. I'll check again in a moment, sir.

COREY: (not reassured) Thank you. (Reluctantly sits down.)

ATTENDANT: (to another unseen row) Seat belts, please! All seats in their upright position! Please!

COREY: I'd better check. (Stands up.) (to Other) I'm sorry. I have to check. (Attempts to get to the aisle.)

ATTENDANT: (hurrying over) Stay in your seat, sir. We are about to take off!

COREY: (stays put) But my father!

ATTENDANT: I will see to him. Please be seated and fasten your seat belt. (Waits.)

COREY: (sits again)

ATTENDANT: I will seat your father when he comes out of the toilet. Now I must be seated myself and perform the cross-check with the rest of the crew. (Rushes off.)

COREY: But – (Frustrated, he sits in his seat, looking back.) I don't see him. . . . Why do they have to call it a toilet?

ATTENDANT: (over loudspeaker) Cross-check almost completed. Please fasten your seat belt if you have not done so.

(Sounds of airplane getting ready to take off, then sounds of take off.)

(Brief blackout.)

(Lights return.)

OTHER: At last!

COREY: (Grips the seat, afraid.) I hate flying! Every time, I say never again. And then I do it.)

(The Attendant is coming down the aisle, checking on seat belts again.)

COREY: Did you find him?

ATTENDANT: What?

COREY: My father.

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ATTENDANT: Oh, the man in the purple sweater.

COREY: Green. Woolen.

ATTENDANT: I have not seen any elderly gentleman in any kind of a sweater.

COREY: He's back there in the restroom.

ATTENDANT: There's no one in any of the toilets, sir. I just looked.

COREY: But you said that you'd seat him before we took off.

ATTENDANT: All the toilets were free before take-off. I assumed your father came out and took his assigned seat.

COREY: Oh, my God, maybe he didn't get on somehow, or walked back off.

ATTENDANT: Are you sure he got on when you did?

COREY: He was just two people behind me. I showed his boarding pass to the –

ATTENDANT: You should have waited at the door for him.

COREY: I guess I should have, but he was right there.

ATTENDANT: Perhaps he is sitting in an empty seat. There are a few.

COREY: Should I go look?

ATTENDANT: I'll look. We wouldn't want to disturb the other passengers. (Goes up the aisle.)

COREY: (calling) I'm sorry!

ATTENDANT: (abruptly) It's all right, sir. No trouble whatsoever! (Disappears.)

COREY: Maybe I can call him. (Gets out his smart phone.) (to himself) Is it all right to use my phone while we're flying? (Nobody responds.) Let's see. (Dials his phone.) (Voice mail answers.) Dad? Is that you? (Listens.) You still haven't set up your voice mail! (Listens.) Dad, if get this, this is Corey. Where are you? I'm on the plane. Flight 121. Did you get on? Are you there? Please pick up. It's Corey. . . . Your son. Please pick up. (Listens. No answer.) (Hangs up..)

ATTENDANT: (returning) I'm afraid I did not see an elderly gentleman in a pink sweater.

COREY: Orange. I mean, green. Can you ask if he's on the plane – over the loudspeaker? The inter-com? Whatever.

ATTENDANT: (irritated) I suppose.

COREY: Oh, thank you.

(The Attendant hurries off again.)

ATTENDANT: (muttering) I'm supposed to start the beverage service!

COREY: I really appreciate this!

(His smart phone buzzes. He answers.)

COREY: Hello? Dad? (Listens.) No, I don't want any solar panels. . . . No. . . . No . . . (Hangs up.)

ATTENDANT: (on loudspeaker) Sorry to bother you, ladies and gentlemen. We seem to have misplaced a passenger. If the gentleman who was supposed to be in seat 11-A would kindly acknowledge his presence, we would be most grateful. Just turn on your seat light or signal, and someone will come to where you are. Thank you. The captain has turned off the seat belt sign at this time and you are free to move about the cabin. We will be starting the beverage service shortly. We are very sorry about the delay. Remember, we accept credit cards only.

COREY: (Looks to see if any seat lights or hand signals have appeared.)

(The Other Passenger staggers up the aisle toward Corey.)

OTHER: Oh, for God's sake! I hate this airline!

COREY: (Reaches out to help the staggering Other Passenger.) You need a hand?

OTHER: No!

COREY: You sure?

OTHER: I'm air sick. You want me to puke all over you?

COREY: Not especially.

OTHER: Then keep your distance.

COREY: As you wish. (Holds his hands up.)

OTHER: Where's that goddamn restroom? I hope to Hell your father isn't parked in there!

COREY: I'm pretty sure he's not.

(Other Passenger staggers off.)

ATTENDANT: (returning) Did you find your father?

COREY: No.

ATTENDANT: Some elderly man held up his hand in First Class, but he wasn't the right person. No pink sweater.

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COREY: Could it have been a green sweater?

ATTENDANT: He seemed perfectly rational and says he's traveling alone.

COREY: What seat was that?

ATTENDANT: It was in First Class, sir. I don't believe your seats were in First Class. Were they?

COREY: (sheepishly) No.

ATTENDANT: I thought not.

COREY: Well, he could have wandered in by mistake. I'd better check.

ATTENDANT: He's not there, sir. I just checked. And the real First Class passengers are being served their beverages now.

COREY: Well, it wouldn't hurt to double check, would it?

ATTENDANT: You want me to go back *again*?

COREY: I can do it.

ATTENDANT: But you're not in First Class, sir. We really can't have any more disruptions there.

COREY: You'd rather have a passenger lost?

ATTENDANT: As I recall, sir, it wasn't the airline that lost the passenger.

COREY: I didn't lose him. He wanders.

ATTENDANT: I'm sorry for your trouble; still, you cannot inconvenience the entire plane, sir. Now I must begin the meal service. Why don't you take your regular seat. Perhaps your father will find you. (Hurries off.)

COREY: He's not going to find me. He's . . .

(The Other Passenger comes from the restrooms back toward the seats, still feeling sick.)

COREY: Are you okay now?

OTHER: No!

COREY: Did you by any chance see my –

OTHER: No! No! No! And I don't want to hear about it!

COREY: I'm sorry . . .

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OTHER: Did you look in the overhead compartments? Maybe your father's there! (Goes back to seat.)

COREY: (hesitates a bit, then calling) Dad! . . . Dad!

ATTENDANT: (approaching Corey) Did you find him?

COREY: I did not.

ATTENDANT: Does he have a phone? Have you tried calling him?

COREY: There was no answer.

ATTENDANT: Let me try. (Takes out a phone.) What's his number?

COREY: I don't believe he has his phone with him.

ATTENDANT: Why not?

COREY: He often forgets it.

ATTENDANT: I see. (Puts phone away.) So you don't even want me to try? I'm running out of options, sir.

COREY: Can we at least make sure that he's not on the plane?

ATTENDANT: Why don't you come with me. We'll check the seats and the toilets together. Yes?

COREY: Yes.

(They head up the aisle toward the back.)

(Brief blackout.)

(Lights return.)

OTHER: (in seat) (stands and looks back.) Oh, for God's sake! Where the Hell is he? (The Attendant comes down the aisle.) Did you find him?

ATTENDANT: No.

OTHER: Oh, for God's sake! Where's the son at?

ATTENDANT: Still searching. He's disturbing everybody.

OTHER: Do you think his father is on the plane?

ATTENDANT: I don't think he ever got on. That is, if there's even a real father at all!

OTHER: You think there may not be a real father?!

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ATTENDANT: You wouldn't believe the crap I see every single day. Crazy time!

OTHER: Really.

ATTENDANT: Would you like a beverage?

OTHER: No.

ATTENDANT: A pillow?

OTHER: Why don't you knock me out with a hammer? Maybe that way I can get some rest.

ATTENDANT: Ball-peen or regular? Don't tempt me.

OTHER: Is it possible the father's in the cockpit with the pilot?

ATTENDANT: They lock it once they go inside.

OTHER: What if somehow he got in before they locked it and is hiding out?

ATTENDANT: Jesus! Let me check. (Hurries to the back.)

COREY: (running into the Attendant in the aisle.) Anything?

ATTENDANT: I was just about to ask you that.

COREY: Nothing back there.

ATTENDANT: And the same down here. I'm going to check the cockpit. (Hurries off.)

COREY: (calling) Do you want me to come with you? (No answer.) (He continues to his seat.) (as he clambers past Other into his seat) Sorry.

OTHER: You're not dragging me into this.

COREY: I'm sorry.

OTHER: I've got enough problems of my own.

COREY: I'm sure.

OTHER: I just got fired two days ago. My dog died last Friday.

COREY: I'm sorry.

OTHER: I'm air sick and I feel a toothache coming on. And don't you say you're sorry! Don't!

COREY: Okay.

OTHER: Why don't you look after your father better?!

COREY: (starts to reply, then stops) I . . .

(The Attendant, out of breath, returns to Corey.)

COREY: And?

ATTENDANT: He's not in the cockpit. Are you positive you actually have a father?!

COREY: Of course I have a father.

OTHER: Any marks of identification? Birth marks on his butt? Aardvark bites on his earlobes?

COREY: Aardvark bites?

OTHER: I'm just trying to help!

ATTENDANT: I asked the rest of the crew if they saw anybody, anybody at all, resembling your father, and every one of them said no.

COREY: I swear he was with me at the boarding gate.

ATTENDANT: Well, I don't think the man ever got on this airplane. That's what I think.

OTHER: And yet we've all had to endure this disruptive nonsense for how long now?!
(to Corey) I know – you're sorry! Screw you and your sorries?!

ATTENDANT: Your father, if he exists, is most likely down there on the ground somewhere.

COREY: Oh, my god!

ATTENDANT: And, no, were not turning the plane around to get him! You got that? Now please let me attend to some of my other passengers! (Hurries off.)

(Corey's phone buzzes.)

COREY: (answering) Yes? (Listens.) Dad?

(The Other Passenger is interested, reluctantly.)

COREY: Dad, where are you? Are you okay?

(Light up on Father on the opposite side of the stage, huddling next to a chair.)

FATHER: I'm cold.

COREY: Dad? Where are you? You didn't get on the plane, right?

FATHER: Inside.

COREY: You're where?

OTHER: (mouthing the words) Where is he?

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FATHER: Under engine.

COREY: You're under the engine? That can't be right. Under this plane's engine? (Listens.)

OTHER: No wonder he's cold.

FATHER: Under the engine. Crawled.

COREY: There's a crawl space beneath the engine?

OTHER: (disbelieving) No way!

COREY: Dad, are you sure? You'd be freezing.

FATHER: Sweater. Woolen.

COREY: Yes, I know. How high are you? Can you see the ground?

FATHER: (looks down) Ground.

COREY: You can see it? Good.

(The Attendant returns, listens in.)

ATTENDANT: (whispering to Other) What's going on?

OTHER: His dad.

ATTENDANT: Is he all right?

COREY: (to Attendant) He's underneath the plane.

ATTENDANT: What?!

COREY: In a crawl space, I think.

ATTENDANT: He'd be dead!

COREY: Dad, are you hanging on to something?

FATHER: (now in a different part of the theater) Cold.

COREY: You're cold. Yes, I know. (to Attendant) Where can we land? How long?

ATTENDANT: I don't know. I don't know!

COREY: Dad we're going to rescue you. We'll have to land. Can you hold on until we do?

ATTENDANT: The air pressure. The air pressure!

COREY: I know! But what else can we do?!

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OTHER: What if he falls?

ATTENDANT: I'm amazed he can still talk, at this altitude.

COREY: Dad, can you see things below you on the ground?

FATHER: Ground. (Points.)

COREY: You can? That's good. (to Attendant) Shouldn't you alert the pilot that we need to land?

ATTENDANT: Don't tell me how to do my job.

COREY: But –

ATTENDANT: We don't contingency plans for situations like this.

COREY: He's going to freeze to death, if he doesn't fall!

ATTENDANT: Well, at least he has his green sweater on! Green, right?!

COREY: Maybe if you charge us extra, you can manage to save him.

ATTENDANT: Don't be snide, sir.

COREY: Nothing else seems to work!

OTHER: (to Corey) Don't pick on the staff. They're doing their best.

COREY: They are?! (to phone) Dad, are you still there?

FATHER: Okay. (Lights out on Father.) (Moves to a different place.) (Lights up on Father.) I'm here.

COREY: Great! We're trying to get you landed safely. Okay?

FATHER: Okay.

ATTENDANT: Let me consult with the pilot. (Starts to leave.)

FATHER: (now in a different part of the theater) Mouse! (Points to ground.)

COREY: What's that, Dad? You see a mouse? Where do you see a mouse? (Listens.) (The Attendant has stopped to listen too.)

FATHER: On the tarmac.

COREY: You can see the tarmac? Dad, are you sure you're underneath *this* plane? Just how high up are you?

FATHER: Okay.

COREY: Are you sure you're not under some *other* plane, one that's parked at the airport? You're sure it's a mouse you see?

FATHER: (pointing at the ground) It's shivering. . . . There it goes! Poor little thing.

COREY: It scurried away? Dad, I think you must be near the ground. You're probably safe. The plane isn't moving, is it? It isn't about to take off, is it?

FATHER: Okay.

COREY: You're not sure? Dad, I think you should get out of that crawl space, as soon as you can.

FATHER: Where's the mouse? Cold.

COREY: I realize that you're cold. But it's imperative that you get on the ground and off that plane. Is that clear?

OTHER: He's back where we started?

COREY: I think so. I'm not sure.

OTHER: What a letdown.

ATTENDANT: Thank god, we don't have to land somewhere.

COREY: (on phone) What, Dad?

FATHER: I'm hungry.

COREY: I understand. We'll get somebody out there to you as soon as we can. (Looks to Attendant.) Right?

ATTENDANT: We'll see what's possible.

COREY: (on phone) What's that?

FATHER: Peach cobbler.

COREY: You want peach cobbler.

FATHER: Like my momma used to make.

COREY: We'll get you some peach cobbler, Dad. (Starts to cry.) I promise. I promise.

OTHER: He didn't even leave the ground?

ATTENDANT: Do you have any idea what airline he's hiding on?

COREY: (on phone) Dad, do you know which airline you're on? Or what type of airplane?

(The light on Father goes out, the phone dead.)

COREY: Dad? Dad, are you there? (to the other two) The phone's gone dead.

ATTENDANT: I'll get someone to check the parked planes. Try to get your father back on the line. (Hurries off.)

(The phone buzzes.)

COREY: (answering) Dad?

OTHER: Ask him again what kind of plane he's on.

COREY: (on phone) You're the I.R.S.?

OTHER: The I.R.S.?

COREY: (on phone) Why are you calling me? (Listens.)

OTHER: Did you not pay your taxes?

COREY: Yes, I paid my taxes. The real I.R.S. does not call you!

OTHER: They don't? Are you sure?

COREY: (to phone) You're going to do what – come to my home and arrest me? (Listens.) And fine me!

OTHER: (to Corey) Are you positive the I.R.S. doesn't call to collect?

COREY: It's a scam.

OTHER: (gesturing at the phone) Give me that! (Takes the phone.) Hello, I.R.S.? You listen to me, assholes. This is the lawyer for the man you just called. We're going to trace your phone number and sic the real government on your fake asses. Got that? But maybe you should kill yourselves first and save yourself the grief. Do you understand me? Huh? Let me repeat: Die! . . . Die! . . . Die! (Hangs up.)

COREY: (uncertainly) Thank you, I guess.

OTHER: The nerve of some people!

(The phone buzzes again.)

COREY: I'll get it. (Answers.) I.R.S.?

(Light back on the Father, who is now in a different part of the theater.)

COREY: Dad? You're back?

FATHER: Dropped my phone.

COREY: But you found it. Dad! You found it. Do you know what type of plane you're on or near? Where are you exactly? Are you safe?

DAD: Cobbler.

(Light out on Father.)

OTHER: (into it now) Tell him to look at the side of the plane.

COREY: Dad, can you see the side of a plane near you? Dad, are you there?

OTHER: Spell out the letters!

COREY: Can you read me the letters you see?

OTHER: Well?

COREY: I think he's having some trouble. He's not answering.

OTHER: Is he still in the crawl space or is he on the ground?

COREY: I think he's on the ground. (on phone) Dad, are you on the ground? (Listens.)

OTHER: What's he say?

COREY: We're having difficulty communicating.

OTHER: Tell your father to speak up.

COREY: Believe me, it's not the first time we've had trouble.

OTHER: My dad was like that too. Drove me crazy. He's dead now, so things are better that way.

COREY: So to speak.

OTHER: (about the father) Would it kill him to say something, for god's sake!?

(Light up on Father.)

COREY: Dad?

FATHER: I'm not your dad! Your goddamn mother fucked some other man, You know that!

OTHER: (to Corey) Is that true?

COREY: (does not answer)

FATHER: Hi, how's the weather out there?

COREY: Dad?

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FATHER: That's nice. Got to go now!

(Light out on Father.)

OTHER: Just like my dad! Only he would have said: "Bye! Here's your mother!"

COREY: My dad would have said that too. But my mom was already dead.

OTHER: . . . I'm sorry.

COREY: She died in childbirth, with me.

OTHER: Oh, Jesus.

COREY: My father never got over it. Or forgave her. Or me.

OTHER: It wasn't your fault. Was it?

COREY: As I recall, I was a baby. (Back to the phone) Dad? Are you still there?

(Light up on Father)

COREY: Do you see any names or markings on any planes around you?

FATHER: No. (Starts to weep.) No. I can't find the mouse. Poor little thing. It needs a sweater.

COREY: Don't cry, Dad. Don't cry.

OTHER: Is your dad crying?

COREY: (trying not to explode) Yes, my dad is crying.

(Light out on Father)

OTHER: Tell him to man up.

COREY: Man up?!

OTHER: We're not going to be able to save him if he's all weepy and incoherent.

COREY: I'm sure you're right. Only it is somewhat . . .

OTHER: Somewhat nothing! Now is the time to take charge.

COREY: Okay, okay, we're taking charge. But with some compassion, some common sense.

OTHER: Well, pardon me for interfering!

COREY: You're not interfering! I just want to do it right.

OTHER: Where's that flight attendant?!

COREY: God knows.

ATTENDANT (returning) The captain notified the air controllers that there is someone in danger on the ground. Perhaps on the tarmac.

COREY: Thank you.

OTHER: Do you think they'll find him?

ATTENDANT: They haven't so far. Is he still on the phone?

COREY: (on phone) Dad, are you able to talk? (Listens.)

OTHER: (calling to father) Man up!

COREY: (covering mouthpiece of phone) (to Other) Please!

ATTENDANT: (to Other) We'll handle this.

OTHER: Yeah, like you have so far!

ATTENDANT: Don't make me have to have you restrained.

OTHER: I'd like to see you try. I can smell the millions of dollars in the lawsuit already.

COREY: (on phone) Dad, are you there? I'm sorry everything is so screwed up. It's not like it is in the movies. It's messy. They're searching for you back there, down there. Somebody will find you. Can you follow that? I just want you to know that I haven't forgotten you. I love you very much. (Listens) It's Corey. (Listens.) Your son. (Listens.)

(Light comes back on Father, now in yet another place in the theater.)

FATHER: My son? I have no son. I have a fake son.

COREY: Yes, you have a son, who loves you very, very much. And you love me very, very much too. (crying) Thank you, Dad. Thank you.

FATHER: Can I speak to your mother?

COREY: I'm sorry. She's not here.

FATHER: Why not? You let her speak, you hear me!

COREY: Mom's not here now.

FATHER: I know. You killed her. You bastard. You fucking little, murdering bastard!

COREY: Dad!

FATHER: Tell her that I love her. . . .Very, very much. . . . I hate you. Don't ever call me again!.

COREY: Don't hang up! (But his father does hang up.) (Light out on Father.) (to the other two) He hung up.

ATTENDANT: I'm sure they're looking for him now. They'll find him.

OTHER: Maybe he should be shouting. Can't you call him back and tell him to shout?

COREY: (to Attendant) Is that a good idea?

ATTENDANT: It can't hurt. But he shouldn't be wandering around on the tarmac.

COREY: (Dials on his phone again, waits.) There's no answer.

OTHER: Maybe your dad's shouting on his own.

COREY: May be . . .

OTHER: What do we do now? Just sit and wait?

ATTENDANT: Would you two like a beverage?

COREY: No.

OTHER: Maybe later.

(Attendant nods.)

(Pause, for as long as bearable.)

(Phone buzzes.)

COREY: Maybe it's him! Maybe they –

ATTENDANT: I believe it's my phone. Takes it out and answers it.) Hello? (Listens.) Yes. (Listens.) He's here. (Listens) He wandered where? (Listens.) I see. Would you like to speak with the son? (Listens.) (Hands the phone to Corey.)

COREY: Dad, is that you? Did they find you? Are you okay? (Listens.) He's *what*? No! . . . No! Oh, God no! (weeping hard) Please don't tell me that. Please, please don't tell me that. (Weeps more.) I didn't save him? I didn't save him? . . .

(The Attendant and the Other Passenger grasp hands, moved.)

BLACKOUT

(We continue to hear Corey weeping.)

COREY: (quietly) Did you at least save the mouse?

LIGHTS FADE