

The Stones Speak

by

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Based on the Novel by Nancy King

Registered WGAw

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FADE IN:

INT. PHILADELPHIA HOTEL - CONFERENCE CHECK-IN AREA - DAY

There's a line of CONFERENCE ATTENDEES. NAOMI GOLDMAN stands at the check-in table. She's compact, attractive, dark hair, 67, tailored clothing of an East Coast academic

CONFERENCE CHECK-IN WOMAN hands Naomi a packet and a name badge. Naomi smiles warmly at the woman and walks away.

A hand grips her shoulder. It's STAN, a sensuous "ladies man" in his late 50s.

STAN

Hello sweetie.

Stan caresses the back of her neck, his fingers lingering on a spot just below her ear.

STAN

(continuing)

Keynote speaker! Well done. How about us doing a little speaking of our own? I've got a king-sized bed that's much too big for one person. We can pick up where we left off last year.

Naomi pretends she hasn't heard and busies herself with registration materials. Stan grabs her wrist so tightly Naomi winces and pulls away.

STAN

(continuing)

What's the matter? Too high up in the world to remember the old friend whose pants you couldn't wait to get into?

NAOMI

Friends don't hurt friends.

Stan's eyes flash with animal anger. Naomi hurries away, grateful they are surrounded by people lining up to register.

STAN

Don't worry! I'll catch you later!

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Naomi lies in bed clutching her throat, the phone to her ear.

NAOMI

(into phone; extremely hoarse)

Is there a hotel doctor?

HOTEL OPERATOR'S VOICE
 (phone effect)
 He stops in at noon. Is it an emergency?

NAOMI
 I'm the keynote speaker for the narrative conference.

HOTEL OPERATOR'S VOICE
 Oh, dear. Let me see what I can do.

INT. HOTEL - ROOM OFF LOBBY - DAY

A DOCTOR AT HOTEL examines Naomi's throat.

DOCTOR AT HOTEL
 I don't see any redness or swelling, but when I palpate your neck, it's very tense. If I were a psychologist, I'd be asking: "What are you afraid to say?"

NAOMI
 (hoarse whisper)
 Can't you do something? I'm supposed to give the keynote address in a few hours.

DOCTOR AT HOTEL
 I can prescribe a tranquilizer to ease the pain in your throat but if you try to talk with your throat as tight as it is, you could do real damage to your vocal cords. Not worth it in my opinion.

NAOMI
 Anything else?

DOCTOR AT HOTEL
 The old remedies work pretty well, with no side effects. Hot tea with lemon and honey. Warm towel around your neck. Time. Figuring out what's bothering you.

INT. NAOMI'S HOTEL BATHROOM - DAY

Naomi wraps a warm towel around her neck. She looks at herself in the mirror.

NAOMI
 What am I afraid to say?

Naomi sits on the bed and takes a drink from a cup of tea. The PHONE RINGS.

NAOMI
 (into the phone; still
 hoarse)
 Hello?

CONFERENCE DIRECTOR'S VOICE
 (phone effect)
 Is this Dr. Goldman? You sound terrible.

NAOMI
 (into phone; sounding like
 death)
 I'll be fine. Don't worry, Marge.

CONFERENCE DIRECTOR'S VOICE
 I am worrying. Professor Harvey's just
 back from working with Aboriginal
 educators in Australia. I'll ask him to
 fill in for you.

NAOMI
 I'm drinking tea. I've got more than an
 hour. I'll manage.

CONFERENCE DIRECTOR'S VOICE
 And if you don't?

NAOMI
 I'll meet you at 2:30 in the Gold
 Ballroom.

Naomi quickly hangs up, drinks more tea, grabs more towels, and
 sucks more lozenges. She begins pacing, then notices the bath
 salts on the sink in the bathroom. She runs a tub of hot water
 and pours bath salts into the water. Foamy bubbles appear.

NAOMI
 Dammit. I will relax! If it's the last
 thing I do.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE AREA - NEAR THE STAGE - DAY

Armed with lozenges, hot water with lemon and honey, cream on
 her neck, and more chutzpah than confidence, Naomi meets Marge,
 the CONFERENCE DIRECTOR, a middle-aged, officious woman.

NAOMI
 (voice a cross between Minnie
 Mouse and Darth Vader)
 Marge, my voice will be good enough.

CONFERENCE DIRECTOR
 You sound like a duck with a sore throat.
 Professor Harvey agreed to take your
 place. He'll be here in a few minutes.

Instead of arguing, Naomi smiles, walks past the Conference Director and onto the stage. She takes a seat, massaging her neck until the room quiets. Glaring at Naomi, the Conference Director goes to the podium.

CONFERENCE DIRECTOR

Everyone, quiet please. Please welcome keynote speaker...

Naomi smiles, walks to the microphone, and gracefully takes it off the stand and away from the Conference Director who stares in amazement.

NAOMI

I'm Naomi Goldman and I'm told I sound like a duck with a sore throat.

The AUDIENCE laughs.

NAOMI

(continuing)

Although Professor Harvey graciously agreed to take my place I think that how I sound is less important than the material I brought with me to share. I hope you agree.

The Audience APPLAUDS. Naomi takes a deep breath, feeling more relaxed.

NAOMI

The children whose work I will discuss were relegated to special education classes with little or no formal testing. As a result, these students learned they had no value and no intelligence. And, like most of their education, what they learned was wrong. The study, done by five researchers, sponsored by the Council on Learning, followed one hundred boys and girls between the ages of eight and twelve over a period of two years. The complete account of the methodology and results will be printed in the November issue of Learning.

As the first slide appears, Naomi uses the brief pause to take a sip of tea.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE AREA - STAGE - DAY (LATER)

Naomi winds up her keynote address.

NAOMI

If you don't mind, I'd like to end the session with a poem written for a girl named Annie. I call it "The Cant of Can't."

"You there, the one who's just been told you

can't spell,

can't write,

can't think,

can't talk,

can't draw,

can't do.

You there, the one who says, 'I can't.'

You come to us.

We'll show you that you can.

Always."

(whispers)

Thank you, Annie.

Loud APPLAUSE.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - DINNER - NIGHT

Naomi sits at a round table set for dinner. Colleagues make admiring comments about her speech as they begin to fill the table. Suddenly a man sits in the seat next to Naomi. It's Stan. He smiles at the group at the table and puts his arm around Naomi.

STAN

Your talk was wonderful.

Naomi quickly stands and walks away. Stan jumps up and follows her.

NAOMI

(walks towards an exit)

Leave me alone.

STAN

Give me another chance. I know last time wasn't great but...

NAOMI

I said, leave me alone.

Pushing past him, Naomi walks towards the Ladies Room. Stan quickly jumps in front of her, blocking her path.

NAOMI

If you don't go I'm calling security.

STAN

Go ahead.

Naomi is frozen in place. Her eyes dart around, looks for a rescuer. She makes a decision.

NAOMI

You just played your last card.

Naomi forcefully pushes past him, yanking her arm from his hand.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Without looking back, Naomi finds the HOTEL CONCIERGE.

NAOMI

I need help. I'm being threatened by a man and I'm afraid of what he might do.

HOTEL CONCIERGE

I'll call security.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

Naomi walks in, accompanied by a sophisticated-looking HOTEL SECURITY man, in a dark blue business suit that hides his strength.

NAOMI

That's him at the table. He says you won't believe me.

HOTEL SECURITY

He's wrong.

They reach the table. Stan is laughing, his eyes fixed on the woman seated next to him.

STAN

(sees Naomi approach, smiles at her)

Hi, sweetie, where've you been? Your meal's getting cold.

Hotel Security walks over to Stan, and discretely shows him a badge.

HOTEL SECURITY

Please come with me, sir.

STAN

I'll be happy to talk with you later, after I've had my dinner.

Hotel Security puts his hand on Stan's arm and whispers something in Stan's ear. Stan gets up, smiles at the table, and addresses a woman sitting near him.

STAN

I'll be right back. Don't go away.

People at the table give Naomi questioning looks. She smiles politely and picks at her salad.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY (NEXT DAY)

As Naomi walks out of the hotel to a waiting airport shuttle van, she passes Stan, who glares. Naomi keeps walking. Her CELL PHONE RINGS and she answers.

NAOMI

(into cellphone)

It went great, Pris. I wish you could've been at this one, though I did have a bit of a problem with laryngitis... No, no, I'm not backing out. I'll be there.

INT. AIRPLANE - COACH CLASS - DAY

Naomi reads a Santa Fe guidebook. In the next seat, a WOMAN ON PLANE with bright red hair and turquoise jewelry smiles when she sees what Naomi is reading.

WOMAN ON PLANE

Have you ever been there?

Naomi shakes her head.

WOMAN ON PLANE

(continuing)

You'll love it.

Naomi smiles warmly. But she's tired and doesn't want to talk.

EXT. ALBUQUERQUE AIRPORT - DAY

Naomi drives a rental car out of the Albuquerque "Sunport" airport.

EXT./INT. NAOMI'S RENTAL CAR - ON I-25 NORTH - DAY

Driving towards Santa Fe, Naomi holds a cellphone.

NAOMI

(into phone)

Priscilla, I can't believe I'm really here. The scenery's gorgeous. I've never seen such a blue sky. And the space...

INT. PRISCILLA'S HOUSE - DAY.

PRISCILLA JORDAN is a tall woman in her late 50s with a commanding presence. She's dressed in a colorful skirt and a bright Guatemalan blouse. On a wall behind her are photos of Priscilla at archeological digs in South America. She carefully puts clothes into a backpack while she talks on the phone.

PRISCILLA

(into phone)

You ain't seen nothin' yet. I hope you're not missing the dreary East coast gloom.

(laughs)

You okay with driving 75?

INTERCUT - PRISCILLA IN HER HOUSE AND NAOMI IN HER RENTAL CAR

NAOMI

Not while I'm talking. Makes me nervous. I've got your directions. I'll call if I get lost.

Naomi has difficulty watching the road. She's intrigued with the magical landscape, so different from back east. Naomi sees a sign for San Felipe Casino Hollywood.

PRISCILLA

Just don't get lost at one of the casinos. Some people start and can't stop.

NAOMI

Pris! You know I'm not a gambler!

EXT./INT - PRISCILLA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Priscilla and Naomi enjoy a late evening dinner of chile releños under the portal, drinking wine, looking at the stars.

PRISCILLA

Who'd have thought being on the same panel at a conference on narrative would lead to us be friends for what -- 15 years?

NAOMI

I'm so glad you asked me to housesit while you're on your dig.

PRISCILLA

I'm happy you could finally see where I live.

NAOMI

This landscape is gorgeous.
 (pours herself another glass
 of wine)
 How come you're always looking at the
 stars?

PRISCILLA

When I was a kid, to get away from my
 father and brothers, I used to hide in a
 clump of bushes and stare at the sky. It
 seemed so magical. Still does. Sometimes,
 when I feel stressed, trying to finish a
 paper or organize notes, I go out at
 night with my telescope and look at the
 stars. Always makes me feel better. Want
 me to show you some constellations?

NAOMI

Sure. I've never seen so many stars.

Priscilla and Naomi stand and walk beyond the portal. Priscilla
 points to a constellation.

INT. PRISCILLA'S HOUSE - NEXT DAY

Priscilla packs her car very precisely, with no wasted space.
 Sleeping bag. Cameras. Tape recorders. Video equipment.
 Backpack.

NAOMI

I made biscuits for breakfast. Come eat
 something.

PRISCILLA

Haven't got time.

NAOMI

If you don't eat you'll be in no shape to
 meet Juan. Who wants to make love with a
 growling stomach?

PRISCILLA

Naomi! How come you know so much about my
 love life and I know so little about
 yours?

Hunger trumps curiosity, and Priscilla reaches for a muffin.

NAOMI

Careful, they're hot.

Holding the muffin in a napkin, Priscilla hugs Naomi good-bye,
 and takes off in her car. Naomi drinks coffee outside, gazing at
 the amazing panorama and the incredible blue sky.

EXT./INT. PRISCILLA'S HOUSE - DAY (DAYS LATER)

Santa Fe is working its magic on Naomi. Her attire is more casual, her stance more relaxed. She walks outside to the portal and watches the incredible sunset.

INT. PRISCILLA'S HOUSE - DAY

A bright summer day. A KNOCK on the door. Naomi cautiously opens it to face ALAN, a handsome man in his late 60s, wearing a cowboy hat, riding boots, bolo. Naomi notices his deep blue eyes and the cleft of his chin.

ALAN

Oh, I'm sorry to bother you. Has Priscilla left?

Naomi nods, puzzled.

ALAN

(continuing)

I'm Alan, a friend and her realtor. Priscilla says she's not looking but she keeps asking if I've seen anything unusual.

NAOMI

Sounds just like her, always searching for the extraordinary. I guess that's why she's so good at what she does.

Naomi stands in the doorway, not knowing whether to invite Alan in or say goodbye.

ALAN

Best archeologist I ever met! Hey, why don't you come with me? It'll be fun. You might even find a house you can't bear to leave.

NAOMI

Me? I'm an East Coaster -- I love my house and my job. I'm not going anywhere.

ALAN

This is Santa Fe. Who knows what can happen?

There's a hint of flirtation in his words and eyes. Naomi smiles.

EXT./INT. ALAN'S BMW SUV - DAY

From the passenger's seat of Alan's SUV, Naomi again views the enthralling local landscape.

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