

SOJOURN NO MORE

CHARACTERS

MAN - a weary traveler.

WOMAN - a wife, tired yet serene.

HUSBAND - her husband.

SETTING

A household at the edge of a desert. Night through early morning.

Nighttime. The interior of a household, shrouded in darkness and soft moonlight bleeding in through windows and cracks in the threshold. A long, soothing silence. Gentle footsteps outside the door. Someone on the other side of the door knocks, gentle at first and then several rough raps in rapid succession. A small commotion offstage. A blunt light comes in from the direction of the commotion. WOMAN enters in a gown. She carries a lantern at eye level and cautiously wields a jagged blade.

WOMAN: Who knocks?

The knocking continues.

WOMAN: (*Louder*) Who knocks? Answer.

MAN: (*Offstage*) Me. (*Pause*) It's... (*Pause*) A traveler. Weary and seeking shelter. Until dawn. At latest.

WOMAN is perfectly still for a moment.

WOMAN: I... (*Pause*) We want no trouble here, sir.

MAN: (*Offstage*) It's cold. It's night and it's cold. I beg you... (*Pause*) Open the door, allow me entrance and I'll be of little bother. Please.

Silence. WOMAN opens the door. At the threshold stands a robed traveler covered in dust and debris. This is MAN. The robe should literally run from head to toe, covering the majority of his face and hiding his arms.

WOMAN: I'll warn you once and only once: I've cut my fair share of meat with this blade. Dead and not dead. And I won't hesitate to slit you from chin to belly. One swipe. And then I'll kick you out and let the critters feast on your steaming entrails. Understand?!

MAN *nods.*

WOMAN: Will you stand there all night, after begging entrance?

MAN: Until I'm granted entrance through express permission, yes, here I'll stand. Until the birds peck me blind and the insects gnaw at me and there's nothing left.

WOMAN: Do come in.

MAN: I seek permission from the man of the house.

WOMAN: The man of the house is away on business and won't be home until dawn rears its ugly head. My word will have to do. Now come in before the night chill wanders in past you.

After a short silence, MAN enters. WOMAN shuts the door. They examine each other. MAN begins to roam the house.

WOMAN: Venture no farther. You bring dust. You bring death. You bring moonlight and the cold air of night. How it nips at my old bones.

MAN: My pardon.

WOMAN: Stand by the door. I won't have you mucking up the whole house.

MAN: Yes.

MAN does as he's told, assuming his position at the door.

WOMAN: Please, make yourself at home.

Silence.

WOMAN: (Clears her throat) So...

She gestures for him to disrobe. MAN's arms come up from under the robe for the first time and he sheds the first protective layer revealing dirty clothing, a backpack, a breathing apparatus of sorts and goggles.

WOMAN: Filthier still.

MAN: My pardon.

WOMAN: Stop pardoning yourself. Come on now.

MAN removes the backpack. Then the breathing apparatus. Then, as slow as possible, the goggles. WOMAN drops the blade. She goes to pick it up, but catches another glimpse of his face and fumbles. MAN kicks the blade into the darkness.

MAN: That's enough.

WOMAN: I suppose so.

MAN: Stand up.

WOMAN stands. MAN touches her face gently.

WOMAN: I've n-n-no wish to be d-d-d-dirtied up.

MAN shushes her. He runs the back of his hand down her cheek.

WOMAN: So. (Pause) You've seen the world?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: You've seen great things? Wonders?

MAN: Unspeakable wonders. Terrible, awesome things. Kings and peasants, gods and demons. Death. But much more Life. So much more. Yes. Many great things.

WOMAN: And now your travels are at an end?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: Well, then... (Pause) Welcome home.

MAN takes her hand, kisses it.

WOMAN: Did you...? Have you brought me anything?

MAN: Yes. In my bag. But you must promise to stay there, in that spot and no threats of violence.

WOMAN: That was before—

MAN: Promise.

WOMAN: I promise. Show me.

MAN kneels, reaches into his bag and removes a stack of photos bound with two pieces of string. WOMAN takes the photos and goes through them, wonder in her eyes.

MAN: A hundred pictures for your eyes and each with a story. I promise you'll hear them all in good time after I've had water. And bread.

WOMAN: What else?

MAN: Has such beauty grown so greedy?

WOMAN: Ever so much, yes.

MAN laughs lightly, pulling out a small cloth wrapped around an object. He removes the cloth, revealing a large hunk of dark chocolate. WOMAN's eyes widen. She grabs the chocolate and begins to nibble.

WOMAN: Oh my!

MAN: Save some!

WOMAN: For what?

MAN: For later.

WOMAN: Foolish man.

MAN: It's all I have.

WOMAN sticks out her tongue, then begrudgingly hands him the remainder of the chocolate.

MAN: And...

MAN takes out a small box. He opens the box and holds it up to WOMAN's face. She inhales deeply. She reaches in and holds up a bar of

soap. She runs the bar across her cheek, down the back of her arm, and down the side of her neck. MAN stands, approaches her. They regard one another.

WOMAN: You're filthy.

MAN: Yes. I am.

Another part of the household. Dim light focuses tightly on MAN and WOMAN, both naked and standing beneath a controlled waterfall trickling from the ceiling. They bathe. WOMAN bathes him, soaping up his back and his limbs. MAN enters a state of deep relaxation. WOMAN soaps his chest. MAN grabs her hands. Long silence. MAN turns around, facing her. They stare at each other, water cascading between them. MAN attempts to kiss her. WOMAN pulls away.

WOMAN: We mustn't.

MAN approaches again. He takes the soap and begins to bathe her now, carefully running the bar down her shoulder, across her collarbone, between her breasts and down to her navel. WOMAN grabs his hand.

WOMAN: I...

MAN runs a hand through her hair, massaging it and then grabbing it. WOMAN moans. MAN is about to kiss her.

WOMAN: I am wed.

Silence.

MAN: To whom?

Silence.

WOMAN: Your brother.

Silence.

MAN: Oh.

MAN backs away. He turns away and bathes. WOMAN watches him, standing just outside the water and shivering a bit.

Yet another section of the household. MAN and WOMAN lay together, bundled in blankets and sifting through the old photos.

WOMAN: This one?

MAN: Found it with a couple others at an abandoned farm. See, that's the farm.

WOMAN: It's gray?

MAN: Red. Well, used to be red and now it's mostly black. From a fire.

WOMAN: So it is gray.

MAN pinches her. WOMAN laughs and picks out another photo.

WOMAN: And this one?

MAN: Oh! This one! Yes. I love this one.

WOMAN: Why?

MAN: Well, look at it.

WOMAN: I am.

MAN: What do you see?

WOMAN: A little girl. She's crying. Her treat has fallen on the ground. She looks straight into the lens...

MAN: And bears her soul. (*Silence*) "Injustice" is what I call it. I have names for all of them, you know. Go ahead. Test me.

WOMAN: Fine.

WOMAN holds up several photographs. MAN identifies them one after the other.

MAN: "Death of a Guitar." "Virility." "Heat and Smile." "The Last of the Pariah Dogs." (*Pause*) "Naughtiness Defeats Innocence."

WOMAN looks at "Naughtiness Defeats Innocence" and chuckles.

WOMAN: Where did you ever find this one?

MAN: In a radiator. Between two cold slats. Nestled away for no one to see. Tangled up in a spider's web. Hiding a great, naughty secret.

WOMAN: And you found it.

MAN *nods. Silence.*

WOMAN: What else did you find?

MAN: Loneliness. (*Pause*) Despair. (*Pause*) Joyous laughter. (*Long pause*) God.

Silence.

WOMAN: You...saw God?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: Where?

MAN *takes the photos, rifles through them until he finds the right one.*

MAN: The same place I found this.

WOMAN: Train tracks.

MAN: The tracks I never saw. But the picture sat beneath a small stone, yay big. Black with little snowbanks of white and grey and flecks of yellow. Just sitting there, as if it went through millions of years of change and erosion, whittled down to this pebble only slightly big enough to skip across a pond and its only purpose was to hold down a little picture. (*Pause*) And that's where I saw God.

WOMAN: What did he look like?

MAN: I don't know if *it* was a he or a she. So I say *it*. (*Pause*) *It* looked like a horse.

WOMAN: A horse.

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: It had...?

MAN: Four legs with hooves. A long snout. Black eyes. A tail with a mind all its own. And hair the color of wheat.

WOMAN: (*Laughs*) You saw a horse. Just a plain and simple horse, you fool!

MAN: No.

WOMAN: You great idiot!

WOMAN tickles him. MAN becomes seriously upset.

MAN: No! It was God!

WOMAN: Did you feed him an apple?!

WOMAN laughs uncontrollably.

MAN: You mock me.

WOMAN: Of course I do.

MAN sulks. He takes the photos away.

WOMAN: Oh... (*Pause*) I'm sorry. I've angered you.

No response.

WOMAN: Smile.

WOMAN tries to manipulate his face, forcing him to grin. MAN moves his face, placing it in the palm of her hands. They have a gentle moment.

WOMAN: You really saw God in that animal?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: And it...did what?

MAN: Spoke to me.

WOMAN: And what did it say?

MAN: "Turn around."

Morning. The doorway. MAN packs his things quietly. WOMAN enters, watches him.

WOMAN: You never should have left.

Silence.

MAN: But I did. And that can never be taken back.

WOMAN: And what now? Where are you off to now? What part of the world is still dark to your eyes, traveler?

Silence.

WOMAN: When you left you took a part of me with you that I couldn't fill with words of kindness from others or laughter from between my own lips or the thoughts of philosophers in books. I couldn't wash it away or wipe it away or erase it. You took a great big piece and went and left me all alone and what was I supposed to do? Wait for you?

MAN: Yes. You were supposed to wait.

WOMAN: And I did. For quite a long while. Until there was nothing left to wait for. Until you were dead to us all. And even then I waited. More so. I mourned.

MAN: And found comfort in the arms of my blood.

WOMAN: Yes.

Silence.

WOMAN: Go. Go back to your horse god. The two of you should travel together and see the world. The great fool and his god on whom he can ride and feed sugar cubes.

MAN reaches into his backpack and tosses her the chunk of chocolate. WOMAN eats some of the chocolate as he dresses, putting on his protective gear in reverse order of how it was removed. When he is fully robed, he opens the door. HUSBAND, dressed in similar protective garb, stands at the threshold.

HUSBAND: I heard voices.

WOMAN: We have a visitor, dear. Seeking shelter from the cold. But now it's hot and he's on his way.

HUSBAND: Nonsense. (To MAN) Stay with us, friend. A storm is on the way and such rags will do you no good.

MAN: I...must journey on.

HUSBAND: This is a mighty fine piece of earth, these surroundings. You should hunker down, make a life here. It's just as good here as anywhere else. We could always use more neighbors. And husbands for our young maidens.

WOMAN: He wishes to go. Let him go.

HUSBAND: (*Ignoring her*) Sojourn no more, friend.

Silence.

MAN: This has been my sojourn. This night and morning. And it is ended.

MAN exits, the door closing behind him.

HUSBAND: Whatever did he mean by that?

WOMAN: You'll find no meaning in his words. He's...a fool.

HUSBAND: Ah...

HUSBAND removes his robe, his breathing apparatus and goggles. He sees the chocolate.

HUSBAND: Is that...?

WOMAN: Want some?

HUSBAND: No. I seek other sweetness.

HUSBAND approaches her, grabs WOMAN and kisses her hard.

HUSBAND: What's that smell?

WOMAN: Soap.

HUSBAND: From our guest?

WOMAN: (*Nods*) As payment for his stay.

HUSBAND: A kind man. A generous man.

WOMAN: A fool.

HUSBAND: My wife sees the worst in everyone.

WOMAN: Not in you.

HUSBAND *caresses her face.*

HUSBAND: Pardon while I beat the dust from my person. And wash the death from my face.

HUSBAND *kisses her again and exits into another part of the household.* WOMAN *stares at the door, unable to eat the chocolate anymore.*

WOMAN: (*Whispers*) Turn around. (*Pause*) Turn around.

THE END