

(NOT THE) METAMORPHOSIS

A one-act play

by

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CHARACTERS:

SAM: A woman, 49. Impulsive, vain.

BEETLE: A beetle, a Sabertooth Longhorn Beetle from Peru, to be specific. Recently born, not long to live.

Darkness. A PROJECTION: "May, 1920" appears, then fades as...

LIGHTS UP on a bench, Center Stage. BEETLE stands SL of the bench, staring at his reflection in a hand-held mirror, facing the audience. He wears some kind of hard mask that obscures part of his face, and when he speaks, it is with a South American accent.

SAM stands SR of the bench, facing him. Beetle does not look at her when she speaks.

I love you. SAM

You-- BEETLE

Yes, yes I do. I love you. SAM

Why? BEETLE

How could I not? Just look at you. SAM

True. BEETLE

Confident, cold, hard... take me. SAM

Take you? Take you where? BEETLE

Pause.

Do you love me? SAM

Do I-- BEETLE

Yes. SAM

BEETLE

Hm. We have only just met.

SAM

Don't you believe in love at first sight?

BEETLE

I do not know what I believe. Yet. Ten years is a long time to spend as a larva in rotted wood. I have not really lived, yes? Seen the world. The sun.

SAM

I could show you the world. I've seen a lot of it.

BEETLE

I am only a few weeks old.

(he finally looks at her,
sees her)

Not like you, yes? You are... Well...

Attempts to hand her the mirror. She rejects it.

SAM

I know.

(sighs)

I know.

(thinks of something)

I know! Can you wait?

BEETLE

Mm. I do not have much time.

SAM

(as she's exiting)

It should only take a few... months...

She's gone SL.

BEETLE

That is my entire lifespan.

*He places the mirror on the bench and hurries off SR.
LIGHTS DIM.*

*PROJECTION shows an article from The New York Times.
Only the date and headline are large enough to be
readable:*

**"August, 1920. Woman of 49 Regains Her Beauty of 25
By Surgery, But She Cannot Smile or Cry"**

*LIGHTS UP SLOWLY on Sam, as she enters carefully from
SL and sits on the bench. Her entire head is wrapped
in one long white scarf/bandage.*

She unwraps the scarf, touches her face cautiously with her fingertips. She speaks to the audience in a flat, expressionless manner. Her face remains perfectly frozen.

SAM

I wake up this morning and find myself changed...
 *(she picks up the mirror,
 looks at herself in it)*
 into a beautiful woman. Again.

Another PROJECTION replaces the previous one. Same New York Times article, but now with different words from the article highlighted and readable:

"I'm just crazy with joy about it all," the rejuvenated woman exclaimed to an interviewer. "But I daren't smile. That would start the wrinkles all over again."

I'm just crazy with joy about it all. But I daren't smile. That would start the wrinkles all over again.

The PROJECTION disappears.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'm finally cured. Now I won't be alone! It's what I wanted, ever since-- ever since he--

There is a NOISE offstage. Someone stumbling?

SAM (CONT'D)

Oh! Hello?

Beetle enters SR. He moves slowly, like an elderly person. He no longer wears the hard mask.

SAM (CONT'D)

It's you. You came back!

BEETLE

Yes, I am returned.

Excited, she stands to face him.

SAM

So? What do you think now?

He looks at her for a long time. Then he nods.

BEETLE

You are beautiful. Cold, hard...

SAM

Yes! Isn't it wonderful? Just like you. Oh, we shall be the grandest couple in the world.

BEETLE

All my life I have searched for someone like you, someone who loves me as I am. I am so thankful, it is not too late.

(he begins to cry)

Yes, I love you. For the last few moments of this life, we will be together. Take me!

She recoils.

SAM

You're crying.

BEETLE

For the joy of our love, yes...

SAM

Eww. Stop it.

BEETLE

My love, I cannot.

SAM

You must! It's so unattractive!

BEETLE

There is no way I can stop. I am, how you say, "vulnerable."

SAM

That's not what I want. You'll make *me* cry, and I don't want to do that! It will ruin everything!

Another PROJECTION appears, same article. New words highlighted:

"I would never have needed an operation if I hadn't gone around laughing and crying over nothing all my life."

SAM (CONT'D)

I would never have needed an operation if I hadn't gone around laughing and crying over nothing all my life.

BEETLE

Nothing? I am nothing?

SAM

No. You're *something*. You're just not... what I thought you were, only a few months ago!

BEETLE

Of course! I have changed. Who isn't changed by living an entire life?

SAM

I don't want to change. I want to be just like this -- smooth, unlined -- forever!

BEETLE

I see. Well, then I suppose you and I, we are not meant to be.

SAM

I suppose not.

He sits, dejected.

SAM (CONT'D)

Sorry.

BEETLE

No, I'm the one that's sorry. I disappointed you.

SAM

Yes, you did.

Pause. He contemplates the white scarf at his feet.

BEETLE

I know!

SAM

What.

BEETLE

I will make it up to you. Here.
(he picks up and hands her
the long white scarf)

Put this on.

SAM

Why?

BEETLE

I will take you for a ride.

He helps tie it around her neck, pilot-style.

SAM

You?

BEETLE

Even though I am large, I am capable of flight. I think.

SAM
You're not sure?

BEETLE
No. I've never done it before.

SAM
Why now?

BEETLE
It's my gift to you.

SAM
I'm scared of flying.

BEETLE
I will keep you safe. Hold on.

They fly. She makes strange, strangled noises -- she is trying to scream and laugh, but she can't do either.

They land. He collapses on the ground, totally spent.

SAM
Oh, oh, that was...
(she sees him)
Are you all right?

BEETLE
(struggling to speak)
Flying... is harder than I thought. You?

SAM
Oh, yes! It was marvelous! Just marvelous! The view from up high, the wind. I felt so free! So happy!

BEETLE
So glad. Thought you were scared.

SAM
No!
(realizes)
Oh, of course. How could you know.
(she looks at him closely)
You don't look well.

She kneels at his side.

BEETLE
(labored)
It was worth it. To make you happy.

He rolls onto his back.

SAM

You didn't have to make me happy. I'm beautiful again, because of you.

BEETLE

Always beautiful. Didn't know. Beauty.

SAM

Shh. Just rest.

BEETLE

Cold.

SAM

Oh! Hold on. Here.

She unties the scarf from her neck, covers him with it. He struggles to speak.

SAM (CONT'D)

No more talking for you. I know, I'll tell you about my operation.

She sits, facing out. She does not look at him while she speaks.

Another PROJECTION appears, same article. New words highlighted:

"Small incisions are made behind the ears and on the scalp, and the skin is stretched much in the same way as one stretches a carpet.

The cure is expected to last eight or ten years, provided, always, that sufficient care is taken not to smile and cry too much."

SAM (CONT'D)

Small incisions are made behind the ears and on the scalp, and the skin is stretched... much in the same way as one stretches a carpet.

The cure is expected to last eight or ten years, provided, always, that sufficient care is taken not to smile and cry too much.

(she looks at him)

Isn't that amazing?

He is entirely still. The PROJECTION fades away.

SAM (CONT'D)

Hello?

She looks at him more closely, then gets the mirror. She holds it up to his mouth; it does not fog. She pulls the scarf up to cover his head, then sits on the bench, facing out. She looks at herself in the mirror.

A final PROJECTION appears, same article. New words highlighted:

"After that the patient may expect to grow old again, and can then allow herself the luxury of laughter."

She sobs in such a way that it could be laughter.

Everything -- lights and projection -- fade slowly to black.

END OF PLAY