

OUR FINEST WORK

by

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CAST

HE & SHE: A couple, both in their mid-40's, but appear older, haggard.

BOY: 12-14 years old; definitely not a man but not a child, either. Sensitive.

SETTING

In the center of the stage there are two chairs, a small table between them with a half-finished model airplane on it. On the walls are large framed black-and-white urban photos.

Time and year are indeterminate.

Lights up. WOMAN, wearing traveling clothes, takes a final few steps toward MAN and stops, a generous distance away. She is carrying two suitcases. He is drinking.

HE
You're back.

SHE
Yes.

Pause.

HE
How was it.

SHE
Hot. Dry. Hard.

HE
Long.

SHE
Yes. It was.

HE
Really, really long.

SHE
Just over a year--

HE
Thirteen months--

SHE
Actually--

HE AND SHE (CONT'D)
Three hundred and ninety-one
days...

HE (CONT'D)
Is a long time--

SHE
Yes.

HE
--without a letter.

SHE
I sent you--

HE
The postcard.

SHE
Yes.

HE
The postcard. Which arrived exactly
three months later. Which
contained one line. Which I
scrutinized, every day. I even read
it this morning. Would you like to
see it?

(pulls out a floppy,
tissue-like card)
Feel how soft it is--

SHE
(stepping back)
No, thank you.

HE
Of course. You wrote it. But
maybe you'd like to explain it?

SHE
I'd... rather not.

HE
Wrong! Try again.

SHE
I should leave.

HE
Haven't you done that already?

She turns to go.

HE (CONT'D)
No. Please. Here.

He pulls a chair out from the table. She walks over, stops in
front of the table, sees the model.

SHE
My god.

HE
What.

SHE
It's exactly the way it was.

He nods.

SHE (CONT'D)
Why didn't you...?

HE
I don't know.

She picks up the smaller suitcase, places it on the chair, sits on the floor. He stands, arms folded.

HE (CONT'D)
Is that an "Indian" thing?

She stares at him, then puts her head in her hands. LIGHTS OUT. SPOTLIGHT UP on BOY, alone.

BOY
For a long time I didn't know what it was. There was always this light, this bright light, in my dreams. And sometimes it was lightning, or a glimpse of the sun, and other times it was the moon, or a shooting star.

(pause)

When I asked my dad what it was, I was like seven or eight. He told me it was my guardian angel. That every night, she would light up my room to let me know she was there, watching over me, while I slept.

(pause)

I believed him. For years. And it made me feel so safe, knowing that she was there with me, guarding me. I'd fall asleep thinking of her. And when she came, every night -- that bright light, so fast -- I know I smiled in my sleep.

SPOTLIGHT OUT.

HE
Well? I'm all ears.

SHE
(her head still down)
I am sorry.

HE
Okay...
(offers)
Drink?

SHE

No, thanks. I gave it up.

HE

With everything else.

(pause)

So. Anything else?

SHE

Anything else?

HE

To say. To explain. To help me understand.

SHE

Not right now.

HE

Oh. I see. Should I wait for another postcard? Will this one be haiku?

SHE

Stop. Just stop. I'm so... tired.

HE

So am I. So am I. I'm tired of this ache in my chest. I'm tired of the way people look at me at work. I'm tired of eating alone, sleeping alone... I'm tired of people asking when my wife is coming back, asking how you're doing. I'm tired of lying -- she's fine, she's doing well, this... experience she's having is just what she needs. I'm tired of feeling like a bachelor when four hundred days ago I was a family. And I'm tired of this goddamn postcard, this meaningless piece of paper that I've been clinging to, the only sign I have left of you, my former life, my former wife, and I don't even understand it! Help me understand it!

Pause.

SHE

I want to help you.

HE

Good.

SHE

But I don't know how. Now.

HE

Brown. Cow.

SHE

I feel so sorry for you.

HE

Don't they joke in Bangladesh?

SHE

I wasn't in--

HE

I know.

SHE

You can't help it, can you.

HE

Why did you come back?

SHE

I thought I was ready.

HE

For what.

SHE

To help you.

LIGHTS DOWN. SPOTLIGHT UP on Boy.

BOY

One night I was at a sleepover.
I stayed pretty late, but I wasn't
allowed to stay over.

(pause)

I never was.

(pause)

We ate junk -- pizza and doughnuts
and candy and stuff, and when I
came home, I felt really sick. I
remember I fell asleep right away,
but then later, my stomach woke me
up. I rolled over onto my back, and
just laid there for a while with my
eyes closed. And I heard the door
open to my room. Real quiet.

(MORE)

BOY (CONT'D)

It made me kinda scared so I kept my eyes closed and pretended to be asleep. I thought, if this is a robber, maybe he won't kill me if he thinks I'm asleep. I'll just keep my eyes closed and he can take anything he wants, just oh God, don't kill me. And then it happened. My light. Through the lids of my eyes, I saw the light and heard a pop. And for just half a second, I thought, thank you God, you sent my guardian angel to save me. I waited a second, then I opened my eyes to maybe just catch a glimpse of her, but all I saw was...my bedroom door closing shut.

SPOTLIGHT OUT. LIGHTS UP.

SHE

But now...

HE

How nice. To help me.

SHE

...I don't know.

HE

It's a problem, isn't it. Because what if I'm not ready to be helped? What if I don't want it now? What if I wanted it before, when you were gone, and now I don't want it? What if I'm beyond help now?

SHE

I know.

HE

No you don't. What if, what if the ONE thing I wanted, the ONE thing that would have helped me was to cling to you every night and cry like a baby, but that was the ONE thing I couldn't have?

SHE

Please.

HE

Yes, please. Please. There's a word I'm sick to death of.

(MORE)

HE (CONT'D)

Please, let us live that day over again, but please make it different this time. Please bring my wife back to me. Please bring... Please let me have my family again. Please, oh please, oh please...

He kicks over the table, the airplane pieces scatter over the floor. She reaches out to touch him. He steps away.

No, thank you. That's not what I... want. Now.

SHE

What is it. What do you want.

HE

I can't have what I want.

SHE

What is it. What do you want.

HE

I can't have what I want.

SHE

From me.

HE

Oh.

(pause)

What are my choices?

SHE

You are hopeless.

HE

Bingo.

She rights the table and begins to pick up the pieces.

SHE

I should never have come.

HE

No. No! Don't you get it? You *should never have left.*

SHE

I had to leave.

HE

Right.

SHE

I had to.

HE

Why? Didn't it matter what I needed? Or wanted?

SHE

No. At that moment, it didn't.

HE

So selfish.

SHE

I guess you could call it that.

HE

Maybe if you hadn't been so selfish--

(he stops himself)

SHE

What. Go on.

HE

No.

SHE

Let's hear it. Go on.

HE

No!

SHE

You've been thinking it every day, haven't you? So why not say it? Go on, say it!

HE

I--

SHE

Maybe if I hadn't been so selfish--

HE

No--

SHE

Fine. Don't say it. You don't have to. We both know it. I've been thinking about it every day, too. Why couldn't I go along with what you wanted? Why did I pick that day to take a stand?

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

You had said no to him for years,
what was one more day? And yet...

(she finishes replacing
the pieces)

There. I'll go now. There's
really no point in being here.

She picks up the larger suitcase, leaving the small one on
the chair. She turns to leave.

HE

Don't.

SHE

Goodbye.

HE

Not again.

SHE

I'm sorry.

She starts to walk away.

HE

I can't believe you're doing this
again.

SHE

You don't want me here.

HE

Wait.

SHE

(stops)

What.

HE

(faltering)

Your suitcase--

SHE

(continues walking)

I don't need it.

HE

Here.

(takes it off the chair,
runs after her)

Take it--

SHE

No.

HE
It's yours--

SHE
I don't want it!

HE
Why not?

The suitcase opens, spilling photographs all over the floor.

HE (CONT'D)
My god.
(in disbelief, he kneels
among the pictures)
How many?

SHE
Three thousand four hundred and
twenty-six.

HE
And they're all--

SHE
Yes.

Still on his knees, he sifts through them, closes his eyes,
and places his forehead to the floor.

LIGHTS DOWN. SPOTLIGHT UP on Boy.

BOY
It started the day I was born. Or
night, I guess. He told me that he
didn't plan it. It just...happened.
That first night of my life, he
stood over the bassinette and
watched me sleep. He said I was...
perfection. He was in awe. Watching
me sleep, he felt like he was in
the presence of God. So he took a
picture of me. Asleep. Because I
looked so perfect. My little
fingers, curled up like fiddlehead
ferns, but still soft and wide open
to the world. He said that at that
moment, every last photographic
image he had ever snapped in his
life, thousands of them, became
totally irrelevant.

(pause)
And of course, the next night, he
had to try again.

(MORE)

BOY (CONT'D)

He couldn't help himself. He had to try to capture that perfection, that... on film. And he kept on trying. Every night. She loved the pictures. She called them "our finest work." She always smiled when she said that.

SPOTLIGHT OUT. LIGHTS UP. He picks up one photo.

HE

Look at that. Those hands. Oh, god. Oh, god. Please. Please.
(weeps; looks up at her)
Please.

SHE

What.

HE

Forgive me. I know you didn't...

SHE

I forgive you. Can you?

HE

Yes. I can. I do.

SHE

Thank you.

Pause.

HE

Why did you go?

SHE

Fight or flight.

He smiles.

SHE (CONT'D)

I knew I had work to do. Alone.
I'm so sorry.

HE

I know.

(pause)

I didn't know you took these with you.

SHE
I thought they would help. For
the first three months, every day,
I pored over each one.

HE
Three months...

SHE
Yes. That's when I--

HE
(pulls out postcard)
Here.

SHE
The day I wrote that was the day I
stopped looking at them. Read it.

HE
(without reading it)
"How many memories are enough to
keep?"

SHE
Without the answer to that one
question I didn't know how to go
on. So I spent the next 10 months
trying to find it.

HE
Did you?

She nods and sits next to him.

SHE
I asked teachers, gurus... They all
told me the same thing: "the answer
will come when you are ready to
hear it." Please. Of course I was
ready! Why else would I ask? So I
kept asking, kept getting the same
response. So finally, I just gave
up. I let it go. And then, two
nights ago, I dreamed that I was
with him. I came back to our home
and he was here, waiting for me.
He hadn't died at all; he had been
here the whole time. I felt so
guilty for not knowing that... but
he smiled at me, and took my hand.
It felt so warm, so real. I forgot
about feeling guilty. I just wanted
to stay like that, forever.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

We walked a long way together, just holding hands. And then he let go-- just like that, so simply, easily, and he was gone. And I wasn't sad.

(pause)

The answer is... none. It's not about keeping them. It's about letting them go. Each one of these

(she touches the photos)

is a deception. It isn't the pictures that matter -- it never was.

(pause)

It was the sacredness of that moment every night, when you stood in awe at the beauty of your child. Our child.

She stands.

HE

Are you leaving?

SHE

Not unless you want me to.

HE

No.

(reaches for her hand;
holds it)

Not that I'm holding on.

Pause. She smiles.

SHE

I'm just helping you up.

He stands, pulls out a chair for her.

HE

Shall we?

She nods.

They sit across from each other at the table, pick up a few airplane pieces, and begin to put them together again. SPOTLIGHT UP on the Boy, upstage center. The Boy walks forward, until he is right behind them and the spotlight holds them all.

HE picks up the piece of the plane that has the propeller on it.

HE (CONT'D)

Is it too broken to fly?

SHE

It's not broken, it's just
unfinished.

The Boy nods and blows on the propeller to make it spin, and:
LIGHTS OUT.

She and He look at each other in a moment of wonder.
SPOTLIGHT OUT.

END OF PLAY.