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A Thorough Drowning

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A THOROUGH DROWNING

Joseph Ferron Hiatt

A WOMAN sits in a straight-backed chair center stage. Upstage, near the chair is a small basin. A single light shines overhead. Upstage, in almost complete darkness is a door. She sits and makes paper roses. After two roses, she speaks.

When they find you...
When they find you, oh won't they have regrets!
Won't they lambaste themselves wailing, "Oh that we had come sooner! Oh that we had listened when she screamed!"

...Have I screamed?

Well, one shouldn't have to each time.
Dire straits are common. Easily spotted.

"Oh that we let such a beautiful young thing come to this end!"

That's what they'll say.
That's what they'll say when the ceiling has come crashing in and I'm found smothered by the lake of water waiting up there.

...Silent...it waits.

Serene, it lies there, confident in its weight, scarcely stirring except for the ripple from the breeze.
It allows itself that.
To be rippled by the breeze. It adds to the tension.

Perhaps not.
Perhaps it's nothing. Could be making it all up.
The product of an over-active imagination.
Or... a stunted imagination.
But all the same, perhaps there is more down here than there ever was up there.

She waits for a drip.

Just a drip.
A drip falling from wherever.

The heavens?
Yes, one drip, falling from the heavens down onto the roof then sliding along like a dirty serpent until it finally finds a suitable hole....
That one?
Yes.
Yes.
It worms its way down only to be caught, "bloop"!
Yes, "bloop"!
Very small sound. Noticed by few.
"Bloop", into the bucket, joining all the others and only then realizing it has been stymied.
To be thrown out like the wash water.

She waits for a drip.

No, there's a lake.
At very least a lake. And they'll say, "Oh there is no one to blame but ourselves! Did no one hear her screams?"
No.
They were lost, lost on them, washed away with the bath water.

She returns to her work with vigor.

Ought really to look the best. Must look the best.
Make them regret their loss.
Nothing to do now but wait.
Wait; soon there will be a drowning.
Nothing to do but wait for the drowning.

"She was helpless really. Most unsuspecting. And oh look, how young she is!"

Was.

"It is more the pity when they're so young. So much more lost. So much more deserving to be alive. It is worse for the young, they miss it more."

She regains composure.

This is not right! One should fight to live! No matter the uphill battle it is one's right!

Leave then.

Said years ago, said, "If things don't change soon leave."

That was said.

"Get coat and leave."

Where to?

That was the next question-or was it...yes.

Determined at the time to be sturdier in the decisions.

Where to?

But first, get up!

Go to the door.

And go out.

She rises setting the roses down with determination. And defiantly crosses to the door. Then stops in almost complete darkness.

Where to?

She returns with great optimism to the chair.

The weather is so dismally cold really ought to have a plan.

A scheme.

Some destination in mind. Where are all those folks headed?

Wonder? Each one going in some direction or another.

Could match up with one of them.

Barrel ahead.

Catch up to the backside of one of them...I'm going with!

Huffs in disgust.

One doesn't latch onto another looking like this!

She admires a rose.

There! Beautiful!

*Ready to escape!
Ah too late
In comes the roof!
Covering her!
Water!
Rushing in around her!
Scream!*

HEL-!

She lets out a loud scream but cuts it short by clamping her hand over her mouth. She looks quickly to the door and back.

Too late! She tried. She made a valiant effort. God knows, God knows she wanted to leave. She didn't quite have the time.

*Yes. Time ran out.
Must be sure everything is in its proper place.
Must be ready for the onrushing current.
Nothing like flowers to breathe life into a room.*

She smells the flowers.

*Add a touch of sentimental loss.
"Look at her...so young. Things like this shouldn't happen to the young!
If only she had run! Noticed the signs, sensed the danger! We wouldn't find her here, limp and waterlogged, face bloated, hair matted. And the flowers make her look so young!"*

*Look at yourself talk this way.
Suppose someone found you this way.
Suppose.
One cannot, anyway, write one's own eulogy.*

*When was that now?
Get up.
Go out.*

She rises, circles to the door and returns immediately.

*Was sturdier in the decisions then.
It is cold out there.
Very cold.
Warmer in here. Just a little.
Looks quiet though.*

Quieter out there. Buts it is cold.

Shiver.

The proportions are astounding. So much more cold out there.

Suppose...gone fuel-gone wick-gone match...crack the pane...a few seconds and 'woof'!

Inundated with cold.

Think sometimes, it looks so quiet, perhaps just slide it open or peek out the door. Just to see if all is as it seems...

Can't take the chance!

Pull the shades!

Turn it up!

Hope.

Hope for a friendly change.

...how long?

How long has it been since the last change?

Forgetting what he looked like.

Well, no matter.

Forgetting where he stood.

There?

"I remember when we were young."

"We were young."

"You're face still had some personality to it then. A look questioning? Do I dare say? Before the studied expression of blankness you sport now."

"You can follow if you like."

Forgetting what he said.

"You can lead better."

No matter.

Go on then!

Get out!

I'm young! And warm! Won't be needing you!

Then I laugh, [She laughs.]

I won't be following! This saddens him. I won't be leading! This angers him.

There are other fish in the sea! This confounds him knowing my distaste for water.

It is a shame. Likely never made it.

But one can't just scream, "decay!" And run madly into the unknown.

"No. I'll stay awhile thank you. I'll stay and preserve myself."

Didn't go out.

Then go! Go out! Go out!

Got a mission now! Find if you can, if there is a chill! If there is a drizzle!

Anyone else would thrilled with so much purpose!

She looks to the ceiling.

Stopped?

No.

"Do you remember our splendid youth?"

No.

"You'll wait here?"

No.

Will this stop?

... remember. remember.

Looked out lately? It's raining of course, that's to be expected. The streets are mobbed with people. Thousands and thousands. As far as the eye can see.

All waiting...silently...still.

No.

Having the time of their lives. There is a chill in the air. That doesn't matter to them cold or warm it will be singing and dancing until the sun goes down!

No one to latch onto?

"You can follow if you like."

"Look down there. It is quite something. People all bundled up scurrying around in and out of shops. Really something to see. Really something to be seen before the drip becomes a wash, and in comes the roof. Pleasant views will be the last thing on her mind then. Screaming like drowning rats, we won't have time for our bit of voyeurism!"

Wash her out! Wash her out into the street!

The only decent thing to be done!

Come rains and let us end this stand off once and for all!

Finish her off, boiled, boxed and buried!

"If only we had looked up! If only we had noticed her before she ended up at our feet. If we had listened to her screams."

Did I scream?

She readies her hand again to stop her scream.

“Had heard her scream.”

Get up!

Get out before it all comes in!

Escape!

Out there at least is the possibility of being saved!

Possibly smack right into some scampering fool!

Smack.

Stun him long enough to latch onto his coattail and be dragged along behind.

Wouldn't mind drowning so much then. At least a valiant effort would have been made.

She lays the flowers down on the chair and crosses to the door pausing in front of it.

But perhaps she won't need to.

Perhaps that was the last.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF PLAY