



FROM THE TEMPESTUOUS PRECIPICE OF RICHARD III

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Some sections of the dialogue appear in parentheses and indicate a slight change of perspective on the part of the speaker – a momentary change to a more introspective mood.

FROM THE TEMPESTUOUS PRECIPICE OF RICHARD III

ONE

A room. A man in his fifties sits in a wheelchair. He is wearing a well-tailored suit. Part of a billiard cue acts as a splint for one of his legs. Behind him are an empty saline drip, a beautiful classical floor lamp and the box for the billiard cue. To one side, there is an armchair with a file containing medical notes. Darkness.

who's there?

is anybody there?

he switches on the lamp. Lights. Pause

ah,

I knew it.

sometimes

a man has

a premonition.

a premonition that exists

even before we do.

before we become ourselves.

(we are the egg,

the feeling is the chicken.

or vice-versa.)

it's like a preconception:

which also comes before us.

it's there before

what we think

of someone else.

or ourselves,

I don't know.

It's like the pain in a foot

existed

before the foot.

or the pain remained,

even after the foot or the leg

were no longer there

not there any more.

they took it away from me,

the leg

not the pain.

gone.
it went.
they went.
foot and leg.
they took it off,
took it away.
never existed.
in its place a piece
of wood
which feels pain.
and before the pain
a sort of itch.
(decay before flesh?
sawdust before wood?)
it's strange
my foot hurts more,
my leg hurts more,
depending on the weather.
the more humid it is, the more it hurts.
the more it hurts, the less I walk.
the less I walk...
and here I am.
sitting here
still, but still here.
pause
I'd like you to tell me about the weather.
I'd like you to tell me
exactly
what the weather will be like today.
and
what day it is today.
or yesterday.
is it night?
is it nighttime?
what night is it?
is it the night of yesterday,
or the day before yesterday?
pause
is anybody there?
long pause
I'd like you to bring me
a glass of whisky
neat.

that would be ever so kind of you.
a good whisky
neat.
bring me whisky
neat
have one yourself.
I don't like drinking alone.
I'm here
sitting here
for ever.

he hums to himself a while
for ever
here
sitting here.
but still here.

pause
I carry the itch
and the pains with me.
always still here
sitting here.

pause
did you hear that?
someone's here.
what's it like outside?
it's raining.
raining a lot
or just a little?
the sky is clear.
(God has a housemaid,
sometimes she cleans the sky so well
that she removes the clouds.
leaving only a slight smell of bleach.)

short pause
is winter over?
has it gone?
has winter become
something else?
into the sun
or the discovered
moon?
spring
no clouds.
is there sunshine?

is it the sun
that's out there?
clear sky.
has our discontent ended?
the winter ended.
no sign of the whisky...
bring me a whisky
and have one yourself.
(I don't like drinking alone.)
is anybody there?
don't worry about premonitions.
preconceptions.
don't be scared:
just because I wasn't shaped
for amorous games
or earrings
pearls
piercings
or other cheap jewels
that would never look good on me
nature made me this way
and what's done is done.
(that's why I'm done for.)
just because
I have no gift for love
conquest
just because my charm
does not exist
nature gave me none
didn't even look at me
when it gave birth to me...
 interrupting himself. Pause
the dogs bark
growl
as I limp past.
their teeth amuse themselves
with my wooden stump.
with my foot
with my leg
no longer there.
 angrily
but the pain is there
the pain is here.

after the itch
of preconception.
it's an error
the error
not the pain
the error of my formation
or deformation as they call it,
ugly raw mark
wooden stump instead of a leg
also raw
also ugly.
bitten.

pause

but is anybody there?

silence

can anybody bring me
a whisky?
anyone?

pause

don't be afraid.

of me

my deformity is all I have left
to sing about.

sing about my own deformity.

mix the plots

the conspiracies

the accusations

and the dreams

with the deadly

hatreds

in the empty pleasures of these days.

short pause

anything to drink?

anybody?

a whisky

and my thoughts

dive deep down

into my soul

which is a wooden stump.

another stump

with dog teeth marks etched into it.

he catches sight of a ghost. A nurse enters upstage with a bag of saline solution

in his hand. During the scene, he takes the man's pulse, makes notes in the file and inserts saline solution into one of his hands

ah,
finally, somebody.
someone.
a ghost in human form?
a hu/man ghost
and what do I see?
empty-handed.
not even a glass
not even a bottle.
nothing at all.
nothing.
nothing at all?
nothing coming near.
can you tell me
give me the news
what day is it today?

silence. He confuses the nurse with his brother, the Duke of Clarence

Clarence,
dearest brother
is that you?
so young.
are you
alive?
imprisoned?

pause. Grabbing the nurse violently

I brought on the anger of King Edward,
our brother,
against you,
with saucy lies
powerful arguments
taking from you days of life
and pleasure
and reducing them to just one,
one day
imprisoned
in a tower.
and then one night.
(your stay in prison did not last long.)

letting go of the nurse. Pause

but here you are young, alive
and handsome too.

there was no error
in my plan:
I murdered you.
what are you doing here
in one piece?
I dispatched your soul
to Heaven.
Clarence,
you're still breathing
but Edward is no longer King.
how is that possible.
(did I do something wrong?)
tell me what day
it is today.
or what night this will be
or was?
ah,
what's that,
Clarence?

short pause

I don't think either of us
are safe.
we're both lost.
at night I toss and turn,
full of horrendous
dreams,
visions,
wild animals.

pause

I dreamt you'd escaped from the tower.
with me!
and that we were on a boat
bound for Bourgogne.
both of us on deck.
we looked back towards England
remembered the hard times
we'd had.

short pause

while we were walking up and down
the slippery, treacherous floor
of the deck,
you tripped and as you fell
you pushed me

(funnily enough, I reached out to save you
even though I'd wanted and ordered
your death)

as I was saying, you pushed me,
into the depths of the ocean.

there

I felt the pain of drowning.

death raw

and transparent

in my eyes.

la morte per acqua

in tutte le notti tempestose.

I die and awake once more.

and now you're here,

I dreamt a thousand times

you murdered me a thousand times.

pause

forgive me,

dearest brother.

do you forgive me?

silence

do you have anything to drink?

a drink between two friends,

brothers lost

in the night.

a whisky

ah?

bring me whisky

and have one yourself.

no need to stand on ceremony,

you know I don't like drinking alone.

an aria by a mezzo-soprano is heard playing softly

here.

sitting here.

the nurse exits

Clarence?

slightly louder

Clarence.

slow fade to black

TWO

The aria continues. Lights. The man is sleeping in his wheelchair. In the armchair, the nurse is eating a Big Mac. His chips are covered in ketchup. Fade to black. Pause. Lights. The nurse is asleep in the armchair. In his lap and on the floor around him are the remains of the Big Mac. The man in the wheelchair awakes and holds the tip of the billiard cue in his hand. He holds it as if it were a baton and he were conducting the aria. Behind him, the box for the billiard cue is open and empty. Suddenly, the man begins arguing with the voice of the mezzo-soprano as if she were Anne's ghost.

Anne,
why do you spit in my face?
when I'm sorry for the fall
of your Lancaster.
why do you accuse me of his death?

pause

I didn't murder your husband.
but it's true
he's no longer living.
he's dead
murdered at Edward's hands.
look
look at my hands
they're clean.

pause

Anne, for the love of God
don't take the name of the Lord in vain.
It makes me tremble.
makes me afraid.

he looks at the sleeping nurse and sees in him the ghost of the body of King Henry. Using the ketchup from the Big Mac, he starts to anoint the face and shirt of the nurse to recreate the wounds of the dead King. Terrified

(oh, the body of dead
King Henry
bleeds
before me.
I who made this happy land my hell.
my winter.
filled it with cries and curses
holy furores.)
look, look.
the wounds of dead
King Henry

opened and bled once more.
it's my presence
that makes them bleed
blood from frozen, empty veins.
what a flood there is.

silence

oh, Anne,
I admit
I was goaded on
by my perverse spirit.
I became a hedgehog.
but you were the cause
of that effect.
it was your beauty
that haunted me at night
in dreams
spurring me on
to murder the entire world
so we could spend
just one hour,
together
alone.
(don't curse me.)
your eyes poisoned mine.
If only they were
basilisks
then I might die
this very instant.
because they're killing me
now
I'm the living dead.
your eyes
drew from me tears.
childish drops of water.
my eyes were dry
like a desert.

pause

I never begged
from a friend,
from an enemy,
my tongue
was never given to smooth talking.
but you, Anne,

are the kingdom I desire.
my heart
and my tongue
beg.
(those lips of yours
were made to kiss,
not to spit.)
but if you want revenge,
if you cannot find it in your heart
to forgive me
Anne,
use this blade
and bury it
in me
in my chest.
thrust it into my neck.
thrust it deep
into my soul
or the wooden stump
with teeth bite marks
where my soul should be.

silence

kill me.

pause. Aloud

don't delay.
because I killed the King.
I killed your husband.
but it was you
your beauty
your eyes
that made me do it.

even louder

go on, kill me quickly.
raise the blade
or raise me up to you.

pause. The aria ends. Silence

Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
And will she yet debase her eyes on me
That made her widow to a woeful bed;
On me that halt, and am unshapen thus.

slow fade to black

THREE

The man is sitting in the wheelchair. The nurse stands to one side of him. In his hand the man holds a silver cup of water.

what day is it today?

it's night.

night already?

short pause. The nurse holds out his hand with some pills

ah, the pills.

it's morning.

morning of what day?

of what night?

silence. The man takes the pills, puts them in his mouth and swallows them with water

my muscles

are twisted.

as if I'd been walking.

as if I'd been running.

a marathon.

a long marathon.

as if I'd spent hours

days

on my legs and feet.

even the leg that's not a leg

is playing up.

It hurts even more.

as if it were flesh

cartilage.

muscles

nerves.

but it's only a wooden stump.

(stolen cartilage.)

an out-of-practice,

wooden muscle.

with sensitive nerves.

how is that possible?

(sawdust?)

short pause. The nurse holds out his hand with some pills. The man swallows them with water with some difficulty

can you tell me what day it is today?

what morning this is?

short pause

ah,

the pain's still here
and the foot
and the leg
are no longer there.
damned piece of wood.

short pause

can you bring me a whisky?
neat.
with my breakfast.

short pause. The nurse holds out his hand with some pills

how many more?
how many more pills do I need to take
for breakfast?
how many colours
strange names
how many pills?
every morning
a rainbow,
without the light of the sun.
a rainbow
in the palm of my hand.
a microcosmos.
dark. dead.
a black hole.

*the man swallows the pills with water and with even greater difficulty this
time. The nurse removes the silver cup and exits*

why don't you open the doors?
let a little light in
on this cemetery
early morning.
damned day
every day.

short silence. Very loudly

light!
give me light!

silence

nobody
everything empty
like a never-ending cemetery.
full of people.

*silence. The nurse returns with breakfast on a silver plate. He gives it to the man
what about the whisky?*

silence. The man takes the silver plate and starts eating. The nurse exits.

Silence. Very loudly
whisky!
silence. He waits for the nurse to bring the whisky for a few seconds
(nothing.)
pause. He resumes eating. Silence. Calling to the nurse
Buckingham!
pause
Buck
ing
ham...
pause.
so what do they say
the citizens?
are they all mum?
pause
they don't say a word.
I'll only allow them to let me speak
after they have insisted
and insisted.
and a prayer book...
louder
I need a prayer book.
very short pause
and a whisky.
neat.
pause
Buckingham!
long pause
when they begin to intercede
I'll use all my energy
to say no,
to begin with.
then depending on how hard they insist
I'll accept the crown.
he laughs
because it would be a big mistake
to refuse the highest position in the land
the majestic throne
the sceptre of office,
fortune
and not reign on this ungoverned isle.
pause. Calling the nurse
Buckingham!

the nurse returns with a book in his hand, a best-seller of the kind sold at airports
come in.

he hands the book to the man and exits taking with him the remains of the break-
fast on the silver plate. Loudly

come

in

all of you.

pause

welcome.

silence. The man prepares his pose. He speaks humbly from the wheelchair
dear citizens,

I see that you want to impose
the golden yoke of sovereignty
on this renowned Plantagenet.

here I give you

now

my final answer:

all your love

deserves my gratitude,

but my unworthiness

commands me to refuse,

such is the poverty of my spirit.

but, God be praised,

I shall give you all my assistance

should you need it.

adieu!

he hides behind the book as if he were reading. Silence. He peers over the book.

Acting as if the citizens are insisting

ahh

no no no no no no no.

why do you insist

in placing on me

this great burden?

why are you doing this to me?

look closely at me.

I was not made for the throne.

no

I cannot accept.

pause. More insistence from the citizens

do you want to force me into a world of cares?

I am not made of stone.

silence. The man reflects a little. In a more solemn tone
cousin Buckingham and citizens

do you want to place this heavy burden on my back
whether I can bear it or not.
I see that I must be patient
and bear the load.

pause

but
if by chance
by any chance
any chance whatsoever
any dark scandal
or reproach
attaches itself to my acts
as
King
or should a black, impure
stain
reveal itself within me
this coercion of yours
will acquit me.

pause

well,
I accept the throne
and
the burden.

*pause. The man realizes that the book that he holds in his hand is not a
prayer book. Softly*

what is this?

short pause

today
is the day
of my coronation.

*short pause. Coronation music is heard becoming louder and louder. The man
grabs hold of the lamp behind him and pulls it so that the source of light is imme-
diately behind his head like a halo. He waves several times. The music ends. Fade
to black*

FOUR

The same room, totally disorganized. Darkness.

who's there?

Is anybody there?

in the darkness a loud crash is heard. Crying in pain

ahhh... fuck!

pause. Loudly, calling the nurse

Buckingham!

short silence

damned traitor.

he ran away

put himself at a distance

by escaping to Wales.

*pause. We hear some interjections and the sound of a body dragging itself along
with difficulty breathing*

it's the dead of night

dark.

(fuck, I even saw stars.)

*he switches on the lamp. Lights. The man is lying on the ground. The wheelchair
is overturned. Pause. Loudly, calling the nurse*

Buckingham!

*pause. With great difficulty, he manages to get up. Pause. He looks around
is anybody there?*

pause

I would like

someone to bring me a glass of whisky

neat.

that would be ever so nice of you.

a good whisky

neat.

bring me whisky

neat

and have one yourself.

I don't like drinking alone.

pause

can you hear me?

is anybody there?

silence

can anybody bring me

a whisky?

someone?

something to drink?

a whisky.

silence

good,

I'll get it myself.

he walks a few paces and decides to remove the billiard cue that has been acting as a splint for his leg. He throws it on the floor and exits. Silence. Offstage, he shouts loudly for Buckingham. Silence. A few moments later he returns, holding in one hand a beautiful crystal bowl full of strawberries and in the other a telephone whose cord stretches offstage. No whisky arrives

(Buckingham!)

pause

fucking traitor.

deserter.

he sits with difficulty in the armchair. He places the bowl of strawberries and the telephone in his lap. While he tastes one or two strawberries, he dials a number on the telephone. Long pause. Irritated, he hangs up

(damned machines...)

calmly, emphasizing each word

son of a bitch.

he tastes some strawberries. A few seconds later, he dials a number on the telephone. Pause. To the telephone

is that you, Elizabeth?

no, no, don't put down the phone.

don't abandon me.

I have something to say to you.

don't go away.

don't be afraid.

pause

you have

a daughter

who is virtuous

fair

and gracious.

her name is

Elizabeth

don't be concerned

I don't want to taint

her birth.

she is a royal princess.

her life is secured

by her birth

the same security

that leads to insecurity

that killed her brothers.
their condemnation by destiny was inevitable
but they lived a just life.

pause

I promise you now
a greater good
than the harm you have suffered at my hands.
everything I own,
yes,
including myself
and everything
everything
I want to give to your daughter
who I love from the bottom of my soul.
don't get me wrong.
I want to make her Queen of England.

silence

everything I have done
that I have committed
was for love of her.

pause

what is done, is done.
it cannot be undone.
if I took the kingdom from your sons
I will give it to your daughter.
if I murdered the fruit
of your womb
in your sons
I will plant the seed
of my fruit
with your blood
in the womb of your daughter.
your sons
brought unhappiness to your youth.
but mine will be a comfort to you
in your old age.
your loss
was only a son who should have been King
and for this loss
your daughter will be Queen.
that is the recompense
I can give you.
and all the ruins

of those distressing times
will be repaired with double the riches of contentment.

short pause

what!
there are still many good days to come.

pause

inform
the princess
your daughter
of my intentions.
prepare her ears
for my propositions
of love.
light in her breast
a golden
sovereign
flame.

pause

and if one day
by any chance
any chance whatsoever
any
chance
at all
I stop loving your royal daughter
I will myself destroy
myself
may Heaven and Fortune
deny me happy hours.
may the day deny me light
and the night deny me rest.
may the planets of good luck
oppose me.
may death,
desolation,
ruin and deca...

he interrupts himself. The receiver at the other end has been put down. Long silence. He puts down the receiver. Silence, during which he tastes one or two strawberries. He looks around. With the bowl of strawberries in his hand, he gets up and takes a few paces around the room, observing it. Very long silence

I will lie here
tonight.
but where will I lie,

tomorrow?
well, it makes no difference.

silence

I have a conscience
that speaks a thousand languages
all different.
and in each language
there is a tale.
and in each tale
a condemnation
of this villain that I am.
perjury,
perjury
and more perjury.
of the highest degree.
murder,
murder,
of the direst kind.
I shall despair.
the souls of those I murdered and that came to me here
are the same ones that will make
vengeance fall
on the head of Richard:
on my head.

long pause

how many traitors are there?
six, seven thousand?
my men are three times that number.
and whatsmore,
my name is a fortress.
I will study
the battlefield
and its advantages,
call on men of great experience.
let there be rigour
and no delay.
The day will be full of labour.

looking at the bowl of strawberries

I will eat nothing tonight.
all I want is
a whisky.
bring me whisky
and this time,

just this once,
leave me alone.
I want to drink it alone.
I prefer to drink it alone.

loudly
a whisky.
can someone bring me a whisky?
and give me another horse.

*silence. Calmly, he takes some strawberries and squashes them on his
face. Silence. A little disorientated, he sees the overturned wheelchair.*

Throwing the bowl of strawberries on the ground
dress my wound.
my wounds...

somewhat tormented
but what day is it today?
what night is this?
shrouded in gloom
and ghosts...
is it All Saint's Day?
Is it already All Saint's Day?

silence
so then it is All Saint's Day.

short silence
the final hour
for the punishment of my sins.
the lights burn blue,
it's the midnight of the dead.
I feel cold drops of dread
in my body
in my wooden stump.

pause
this night of shadows
has brought terror to my soul.
and I see no daylight.
It's far away.
has anyone seen the sun today?
bastard. traitor. deserter.
(seems it doesn't want to shine.)
this is a day of darkness.
but we will advance
prepare another horse for me.
call together my army.

short pause

I've prepared a few words for them.

skilfully, he looks at the two halves of the billiard cue and screws them together.

Using the billiard cue as a lance

remember who your enemies are:

a horde of vagabonds, peasants and runaways,

lackeys

and, I dare say, some fucking bastards

these are the ones who are bringing unrest

to those of us blessed

with intelligence.

who sleep safe in their beds at night.

and who leads them?

Richmond,

A man who has never felt the cold snow

enter his shoes

a man with two legs.

we'll send these stragglers running

over the sea

repel these animals from here,

poor rats.

they want to take our lands,

sleep with our wives

and ravish our daughters.

a choir of male voices is heard singing softly. Loudly

can you hear the drums?

fight on, fight on.

archers,

draw your arrows up as high as your heads

startle the heavens with your broken lances

attack!

long silence. The choir of male voices stops singing. Silence. Calmly

in just one night

as King

I perform more miracles than any other man

confront all kinds of dangers.

and now my horse is dead,

and I fight on foot

I'm looking for Richmond in the jaws of death.

silence

anyone?...

can anyone bring me

a whisky?

pause

a whisky.
my kingdom for a whisky.
silence
(with my incantation at an end
I'm left with nothing but what I am
which in truth
is rather precarious.
I'm a victim of the black arts
that emerges with the spirits
at night or during the day
and paying a high price for them.)
silence
a dark fear is all that remains.
long silence
now,
your will can leave me here
in no man's land
on this sterile isle
or send me to that other place...
fade to black

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