

Waiting for the Rain

a play in one act
by
Stewart Skelton

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Stewart Skelton
213.461.8189
Wait4Rain@aol.com

SETTING: A cluttered, but reasonably clean, old
 apartment in St. Louis.

CAST:
ERIC, a man living alone in the city.
THE WOMAN, lost in the city.

TIME: Late Autumn/Early Spring

(Lights up to reveal ERIC's apartment. He is sitting in a large chair, watching THE WOMAN. She sits at the radiator, wearing his clothes, too large for her, with a blanket wrapped around her body. Her hair is wet. She stares at the radiator and holds a cup of coffee. She has just finished eating and the dishes sit on a small table at her side. It is raining outside. There is a pause; a clock ticks quietly.)

ERIC

Was it good?

(Pause.)

The food, I mean. Fresh hamburger, bought it today.

(Thinks.)

No. No, it was yesterday. I bought chicken today.

(Long pause.)

Well, I'd better clean up here.

(He proceeds to clear the dishes.)

Did you say something? No, I didn't think so. You know, you haven't said a word since I found you. Not a word.

(He continues doing the dishes and such. She stares out the window.)

And nothing when I brought you in here. You didn't even say anything when I started taking your clothes off. I wouldn't have done that, you understand, but it didn't look like you were going to do it. You found your way around the bathroom well enough. you even dressed yourself, so I guess you're not helpless, right? Right. It'll be a while before your own clothes are dry. They were a mess. I don't know who got his hands on you, but I think he ruined your blouse. Sorry.

(Whistles while he cleans dishes. After a moment, a thought strikes him.)

Of course! You're dumb, right? I don't mean dumb like stupid, uh, I mean, um, you know, uh, can't talk, uh, mute!

(Pause.)

Well, are you? Stupid question. If you were mute, you certainly couldn't tell me, could you? You could use sign language, or at least nod your head.

(She drinks from the cup.)

That's not much of a nod. Look, if you are a mute, I would like to know. I mean, I would feel better if I knew you weren't talking because you couldn't, not because you didn't like me. You understand that, don't you? Oh no. You wouldn't be deaf too, would you? Another stupid question.

(He confronts her with a pen and some paper.)

Here. I'm going to write a question on this paper.

(Writes.)

Are you deaf? Just nod.

(Finishes.)

There. Well?

(She looks into his eyes.)

You're looking at me. That's the first time you've really looked me in the eyes since I brought you in here. They're nice . . . nice eyes. No nod though, huh? Well, at least you're not blind.

(She holds the cup out to him.)

More coffee? Okay, fine. I guess I'm finally getting through a little. You can tell a lot with eyes. I felt you were trying to tell me something when you looked at me just then. I guess what you were trying to tell me was that you wanted more coffee. That's okay; it's something.

(Hands her fresh coffee.)

Here you go. It's hot. And fresh. I - -

(She accepts it and resumes staring out the window. Pause.)

What is your name?

(Pause.)

Who are you?

(Pause.)

What happened to your purse? Did somebody take it, or did you just lose it?

(Pause.)

You're not much help, you know that? How am I supposed to get to know you better? You won't answer my questions. You had nothing with you but the clothes on your back, what was left of them. So how am I supposed to get to know you? Huh? It's not fair, you know? I mean, you get to know me because I'm talking.

(She drinks and continues looking out the window. Pause.)

All right, look, I'll tell you. I'll tell you about me. I'll tell you why I was in the dark tonight, okay? Okay.

(Pause.)

It reminds me of the place where I grew up, out in the country. On days when it rained, but not too hard, I'd put on a raincoat and some boots, and walk around the farm. I'd kick around in the puddles, dam up little streams, then wreck the dam and watch the water that had built up just pour out of there, washing everything away. Sometimes I'd run along with it, try to build another dam before it went too far. Sometimes it worked.

(Pause.)

Just the rain, though . . . just the rain falling through the trees . . . that was the best. I liked that.

(Pause.)

I loved that.

(By now, he is sitting and staring out the window also. Pause.)

The rain falling through the trees made a great sound.

(Pause.)

And in the park, all those trees, it takes me back. It feels the same. It sounds the same. Except when the cars go by. That's why I try to stick to the inside of the park, away from the streets. It feels good walking around in there. Most people try to find shelter when it's raining; they don't stay out in the open. And I can walk alone in there, in the park, in the dark, in the rain. Oh, sometimes I'll meet somebody with no place to go: runaways mostly. You'd be surprised how many runaways find their way to that park.

(At the mention of runaways, THE WOMAN takes more interest in her surroundings, surveying the room more closely, stealing glances at ERIC when he isn't looking. She drinks her coffee.)

They sleep under those picnic shelters, or in the restrooms if it's real cold. They can only go back where they came from, and they sure don't want to go there. Wherever that is.

(Pause.)

How about you? Where did you come from? No, wait! Don't tell me, let me guess. Thanks. Let's see, um, Kansas City. No. Chicago? Maybe a little closer, huh? How about St. Charles? Wentzville? Right here in St. Louis? Hm. Across the river. Belleville? Alton? No, for some reason, you look like a Missourian. I think that's because you won't say anything to me. I mean, it's like instead of telling me, you have to, you know, show me.

(Bursts into laughter.)

Get it? Show me. The "Show Me" State? Missouri? Get it? Get it?

(Laughs. Stops. Sandra drinks coffee.)

Okay, so I'm not a comedian. You're no life-of-the-party, you know.

(Confronts her with pen and paper again.)

Are you sure you're not deaf?

(She sips coffee.)

You're not even looking at me. So, what; I'm not good enough to look at?

(She moves to a different seat. He watches her. Pause.)

There're not only runaways in that park, you know. A lot of guys are in there, looking for other guys. And there are some nasty people in there too, bad people, looking for something else. And they'll take it; they don't ask. Maybe you know about that already. Well, all those folks, usually they have someplace to go; they're taken care of. But not you. You were there, by the shelter, all wet and shivering, not even trying to get out of the rain. I'll be surprised if you don't catch your death.

(She pulls the blanket closer.)

I'm just trying to . . . Your hair's still wet. Sorry I don't have a hair dryer. I like it that way, though. I really do. It looks . . . sexy.

(Slight pause.)

Here, let me freshen that for you.

(He takes her cup, fills it, and crouches beside her.)

I didn't mean to . . . I guess I just . . . Uh, here.

(She takes the cup without looking at him. He moves away.)

It's still hot.

(Pause.)

So, it was raining. I was a little bored, restless, and I decided to take a walk. I walked over to the edge of the park, kicked around in some puddles. And I just stood, for a while, watching the rain fall against the light of the street lamps; sort of my last look at the outside. And tonight, like every other night, I didn't stand there long, because of the noise of the cars. I walked further into the park, into the trees. I listened to the rain splattering on the leaves. Then I watched the fountain a little. Did you watch the fountain at all? That's a great little fountain; all those lights . . .

(Slight pause.)

All right, let's find out if you're a mute.

(Writes.)

Are you a mute? Can't talk? Just nod. Okay?

(Finishes.)

There.

(She moves to the sofa and curls up with her blanket and coffee.)

Is that a yes or no? Look, maybe I'm annoying you. Well, I'm sorry, but you can take being quiet just a little too far. I mean, I don't mind talking. I like having someone to talk to. But you could at least say, "Yeah," or "Uh huh," something. Just to let me know if I'm - - It's not as

much fun if you don't participate. You know? Okay. I am going to, at least, say you are not deaf. That way, I won't feel stupid talking to you. Okay? Okay. So, you're not deaf. You could be dumb, a mute. You could be mentally off, a bit, you know. But I don't think so. You could be very angry. If you are, I hope not with me. You could be very scared, of someone, of something, of me.

(Pause.)

Look, I'll give this to you in case you get an urge to write something. Here, I'll put it right here for you. Okay?

(He puts paper and pen on sofa next to her.)

Feel free to write anything. Anything at all.

(Long pause. He looks at her, studies her. He then get a Polaroid camera, which he checks for film and flash. He approaches her.)

You are very attractive, you know?

(He brushes some hair from her forehead and opens the blanket at her throat. She does not look at him.)

Very attractive. Do you mind if I take your picture? Of course you don't.

(He takes several shots in rapid succession as he speaks.)

Now, feel free to pose, if you'd like. Or, you can just stay as you are. Yes, that's good. That's a good one for sure. Just a couple more. Yes, you are very attractive. I'll bet you have a lot of boyfriends, don't you? Men friends. They'll be ready in just a minute.

(Pause as he waits for the pictures to develop. She closes the blanket at her throat and sips coffee.)

There we go. Hey, your photograph real nice. See?

(She moves to another seat.)

Uh huh. Your, uh, your picture looks familiar. I mean, you look familiar. I feel like I've seen you before, your picture. Funny how a picture will do that.

(Pause as he sits and studies the pictures. She studies him, but does not let him see.)

You're not . . . You're not from around here, are you? I mean, I just can't think where maybe I've seen you before, unless you're a model or something. You know: commercials, magazines? I might have seen your picture somewhere. Or you could be from around here. Couldn't you?

(Pause.)

Hey!!

(He crosses to her.)

Tell me where you're from! Okay? Or tell me if you can speak. Can you hear me? Why were you sitting alone in the rain? Where are you from? What is your name? Who are you? Your name. Say something! Here. Here, write something. Just write something. I don't care what it is. You - -

(Pause. She drinks coffee.)

So go ahead and sit there. Like a bump on a log. That was one of my dad's favorite expressions: "Don't just sit there like a bump on a log."

(He sits and stares out the window.)

My dad's okay. I'm okay. You're - - Well, we just don't know about you, do we?

(She drinks.)

You remind me of a girl I used to know. Her name was Sandra. When she was mad at me, angry, she wouldn't talk, she wouldn't look at me, she wouldn't let me touch her. She'd just sit there like you do: a goddamn bump on a log.

(Pause.)

How about if I call you Sandra? You don't mind, do you? I didn't think so. Oh, that Sandra. Shew as deep. She was very deep. College graduate. I really didn't fit in with her crowd. So, she got tired and left.. She just left. We'd been together for, oh, about a year, I guess. She said, "This relationship simply isn't working out." She said she couldn't understand what made her stay with me as long as she had. To tell the truth, I didn't really understand it much either.

(Slight pause.)

Yes I did. I understood. She thought I was cute, from the country and all, new kid in the big city. But I guess I just wasn't cute enough to keep her interested for very long. Wasn't enough something. That's okay, though, I'm not upset with her or anything. I mean, when she was still with me, it was just us, as far as I was concerned. I really didn't have any other friends. Not like she did. And whenever she introduced me to somebody, I felt like a, a pet. So, I guess it was the best thing for me: her leaving. Because now, I'm not tied down to anybody. I'm free. I am free to do as I please with whoever I please. And I do.

(He crosses to her.)

You are very attractive. I wonder what you were doing out there all alone, in my park: cold, wet, quiet, shivering, ragged. You looked like you'd been through hell. Did someone hurt you? Did one of the bad, nasty people get you?

(Pause.)

You're not having any fun, are you? Well, we can't have that.

(He takes her coffee
away, then fixes a couple
of drinks. He crosses to
her and offers one. She
doesn't respond.)

Here is your drink.

(He puts it in her hand.)

Cheers.

(He drinks; she doesn't.)

You shouldn't have been there unless you had a reason. Were you hiding? Were you hiding in the park? Or, were you waiting? You were waiting for someone to meet you there. By the picnic shelter. Who? A lover? A friend? I met you instead, didn't I? I came to take you away. Wasn't that nice of me?

(She takes a sip of her
drink.)

That's it. Drink up, we're celebrating. We are celebrating your rescue. Forget about whatever it is you are running from, whoever it is you were waiting for. I have you now. You're safe here. I'm going to take care of you.

(She takes a sip of her
drink.)

There you go. Now you're getting into the spirit. How about a toast! To us: Eric and, and, uhhh . . . Sandra. I've never known a happier couple.

(He drinks. She crosses
to the large chair
originally occupied by
ERIC, and sits. He
follows with his eyes.)

On the move again. I think you'll like that chair. It's the best seat in the house. Hey! I know what. I'll show you my guest album! I keep pictures of all the people who visit me. I keep them in this album. I took all the pictures myself. Here you go, see? Now, I started this album about two years ago, not long after Sandra, the first Sandra, left me. The older pictures aren't just too great. But that's okay; I'm no pro. I wish I had started the album earlier, for my first guests. They were special to me because, well, they were the first. But, I have to rely on my memory for them, no pictures to help. You'll notice that, most of them are a little wet, their hair. Just like you. I really should invest in a hair dryer someday. Oh, she has her eyes shut; she just wouldn't open here eyes; I think she was a little shy. Look at that, he even signed his picture; very nice boy. She was a nervous young lady. Her name was . . . I don't think she enjoyed being here. I

felt bad about that but . . . well. He, he was a nice young man; he helped me move some things to the storage room. That's a nice smile. Not many of my guests smile. I think that's because they have so much on their minds, so many problems. I try to make them comfortable. I try to be kind. I feed them. I clothe them. You're living proof! But very few of them smile for me. How about a smile from you? Will you smile for me? Okay, maybe not yet. You'll smile for me later. Isn't she lovely? This girl, this girl was from Michigan, but not from Detroit. She's the only one from Michigan who wasn't from Detroit. She was a nice girl. Now that young lady was my last visitor before you.

(THE WOMAN stiffens, her eyes fixed on the last photograph.)

She was from Joplin, on her way to New York. She said. She was very attractive, too. And this space, over here, is for you. I'll have to get a new album soon.

(He crosses to the pile of pictures he just took. She stares at the photograph, touches it, then downs her drink in one gulp. He crosses to her, sorting through the shots.)

Which one to use? I have some nice ones here; too bad you didn't smile for any of them. These look like the best. This one.

(He puts it in the album, hesitates a second, looks at her, looks at the album page, then takes the album from her lap. He continues looking at the page it's opened to.)

Very attractive. Pictures.

(He closes the album.)

And that's my album, my guests.

(He puts it away.)

I still think I've seen you before, or someone like you. Can't be sure, though for a minute, I thought maybe, you and that last girl . . . You can have these if you want.

(She doesn't respond.)

Okay.

(He drops extra photographs in a wastebasket.)

Hey, you finished your drink! You want another?

(She holds out the glass,
but avoids looking at
him.)

Either you can hear me, or I got lucky.

(She sets her glass on
the small table by the
chair. He waits a
moment, then takes her
glass and makes another
drink. He sets it on the
small table and sits away
from her with his own,
which he refilled.
Pause. He watches her
and drinks.)

Do you like me? I want very much for you to like me. And I
can't help feeling there is some hostility here. I don't
like that; I think it's rude. Sandra? Please. Please
listen to me. I want to be your friend. I want to help
you. I want - - to help. To help.

(He crosses and crouches
down beside her. He
brushes back some hair
from her ear.)

Help.

(He strokes her ear.)

Say something to me.

(He caresses her cheek.)

Say something?

(He strokes her neck.
She grabs her drink and
gulps it down.)

Another?

(He fixes her another
drink. She takes it when
proffered.)

We're talking, you know. We are.

(He crouches to the other
side and brushes the hair
from her ear.)

I like it better when you respond.

(He takes hold of the
blanket with both hands.
She takes a drink.)

Don't be frightened of me, Sandra.

(He kisses her ear. She
takes a drink.)

I want to be your friend.

(He starts stroking her neck and pulling the blanket open. She bolts from the chair and leaves him holding the blanket. She stands with her back to him and finishes her drink.)

Now you're showing some life! Good girl. You won't need this anymore.

(He takes the blanket offstage, into the bedroom. She crosses to the kitchen area and searches for a weapon. His voice spins her around, her back to the counter.)

If you need more ice, there's some in the bucket there.

(Pause as they stare at each other across the stage.)

You do look familiar.

(He crosses to within a foot or two of her. They continue to stare.)

I do wish you would say something to me. So attractive.

(He touches her face, then brushes back her hair. He kisses her and receives no response, no resistance. THE WOMAN clenches her eyes shut. He steps back.)

There must be something about me you really don't like. Is that it? Well, that's gratitude for you. I bring you in here; I get you cleaned up; I feed you! But you won't talk to me, you won't look at me. Once! You looked at me once!

(She opens her eyes, looking straight at him.)

Twice. Okay, three times. And I should be happy with that, right?! Well, thanks a lot; you're a real wildcat. Go on, get back to the chair.

(She doesn't move.)

What, are you paralyzed now, too?

(She continues to stare at him.)

Will you stop? Staring? Just stop. Get -- go -- just -- just stop that -- Come on!

He takes her by the arm and puts her into the large chair. He walks away. She doesn't look at him. He turns to look at her. He crosses to the kitchen and pulls out a knife. He hesitates a second, then takes a carrot from the refrigerator and trims off the ends. He puts down the knife and returns to her side. He breaks the carrot in two and holds half out to her.)

Would you like some of my carrot? They're fresh; I bought them, I bought them today.

(No response. He puts the carrot in her hand. He crosses to the seat she originally occupied, and sits, nibbling his carrot.)

I don't know what's gone wrong. I mean, I had plans. I take a walk in the park, in the rain; I have plans. I like the rain. You do too; I saw that the minute I met you, Sandra. You really like it out there. I just wish you'd like it in here. With me. I, I don't expect much. No more than I need. A smile, a kind word, a little kiss.

(He is staring out the window.)

A smile. Will you smile for me, Sandra?

(Pause. Slowly, a wry smile forms on her face. She clutches the carrot with one hand. With the other, she grips the arm of the chair, knuckles white. The clock ticks, the rain keeps coming, the lights slowly fade to black.)

THE END

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