

THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT SACRIFICE

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SCENE

*(Paul is sitting at a table, a set of small planting pots and a pitcher of water in front of him. Also on the table are several piles of finely-grained dust and near each one is a seed. Melissa enters, and approaches him in exasperation.)*

MELISSA

There you are! We've been looking all over the place for you!

PAUL

Ta da.

MELISSA

Don't *ta da* me. We've been worried sick about you!

PAUL

We? Who—

MELISSA

Me, Dennis, Alison... Frankie, Grant... We've been driving all over town. How come you aren't answering your phone?

PAUL

It's at home.

MELISSA

Crap lot of good that d—

PAUL

I didn't want any interruptions.

MELISSA

Well, that's the kind of thing you tell people before you drop off the grid for three freakin' days.

PAUL

Sorry. I... I didn't think anyone... Never mind.

MELISSA

Never mind? Never mind!?

PAUL

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you.

MELISSA

Well you did. You worried all of us.

*(Melissa stops and looks around, taking in the environment.)*

What are you doing out in this old shed anyway? Are you okay?!

PAUL

Yeah, I'm okay. Really. I'm fine. I just needed a little time for a...

*(Melissa gives him a "go on" look.)*

It's kind of a ritual I've come up with.

MELISSA

Ookay... Is it... okay to ask...

PAUL

Yeah, it's fine, I guess. It's nothing satanic or political.

MELISSA

Thus spake the Department of Redundancy Department. *(Beat.)* So? *(Awaiting a response, then...)* Consider yourself asked.

PAUL

You remember Lynn?

MELISSA

Your friend from work?

PAUL

Ex-friend, but yeah. Her.

*(Paul motions to one of the piles of dust.)*

MELISSA

Oh my god. Please tell me you didn't—

PAUL

What? No. No, no. Nothing like that. It's not... physically her. It's... *metaphysically* her.

MELISSA

Where'd you get the dust, Paul?

PAUL

It doesn't matter.

MELISSA

I'm thinking it does. Where'd you get the dust?

PAUL

Oh, stop worrying. I didn't... She once gave me a little stuffed animal. A camel. And now it's... uh... transcended to camel heaven.

MELISSA

A little unsettling, but certainly within the bounds of legal. Okay. Go on.

PAUL

Anyway, so there's Lynn. That's Davy. You wouldn't know him. He lived next door to us when I was a little kid. Or this one, a girl I met in an airport when I was twelve. I don't even remember her name, but we were going to be pen pals. I wrote her like a dozen letters, but she never, uh... Anyway, Joan and Andy are over here. You remember them.

MELISSA

*(Sadly...)*

Yeah. That's a lot of piles of pain.

PAUL

Yep. A lot of loss. And what with all the loss that's been going on lately, I... I've been thinking about what it all means. *(Beat.)* You remember that one-acts thing we all went to last month?

MELISSA

Yeah. At Burling Stages.

PAUL

Right. And do you remember the play they did right before intermission? Called *Le Sacrifice*? About the French soldier who finds an enemy soldier in his bombed-out house.

MELISSA

Oh yeah. I liked that one.

PAUL

Ever since then, I've been thinking about the distinction between loss and sacrifice. A lot. About how they're only really distinguished by a state of mind. Anyway, it kind of motivated me to try something.

*(Paul pulls over a little pot, and picks up the seed next to the Lynn dust.)*

You know what this is?

MELISSA

I'm gonna guess you're not looking for "it's a seed".

PAUL

This is patience.

MELISSA

Patience.

PAUL

Right. Not a lot of patience. Just a little. A *seed* of patience. That's about an hour, as I figure it. One hour... between *fearing* that something awful may have happened, and *concluding* that something awful really did happen. Just a little breather, you know?

*(Paul takes the little pile of dust, and mixes it into the dirt that's already in the pot. He then takes the seed, buries it, and pours a little water over it.)*

Now, when I think back on Lynn, I'll remember this flower. And the next time everything feels dark and hopeless, I'll remember... hopefully... to take that hour.

MELISSA

And if you don't remember?

PAUL

Well, that's why I wrote out these.

*(Paul takes a small set of index cards out from a pocket, flips through to find one, and hands it to Melissa.)*

MELISSA

*(Reading...)*

Instructions for Patience...

PAUL

*(Laying some out on the table...)*

Here's one for Davy... for Joan... Betsy...Dean...

*(Paul puts down the rest of the stack, and Melissa picks them up, reads from one...)*

MELISSA

Instructions of Kindness. Andy. Bring hands together. Whisper...

*(She nods appreciatively, then flips to another card.)*

Instructions for Freedom. Little Red-Headed Girl? Isn't that Charlie Brown's...?

PAUL

Like I said, I couldn't remember my not-a-pen-pal's name, so I just wrote that. It's enough to remind me.

MELISSA

Wow. Paul, this is...

PAUL

Honestly, what's the worst thing that could happen? The world has a few more flowers in it? That can't be a bad thing.

MELISSA

No. No, it can't.

PAUL

I used an impatiens seed for patience. For the irony of it all.

MELISSA

Clever.

PAUL

Thanks. I thought it was a nice touch.

MELISSA

What about for Kindness?

PAUL

Bleeding Heart.

*(Melissa gives him a look.)*

What? It's a ritual, not a math quiz. You gotta have a little fun with these things, Mel.

MELISSA

There's the twisted sense of humor we've all come to expect. Never change, Paul.

PAUL

Funny, but... that's kind of the whole point.

MELISSA

What? What is?

PAUL

Change. We need change. Need it so badly.

MELISSA

Yeah. That's for sure.

PAUL

There's just so much hate going around, you know? And it's so easy to tell everyone that they should stop... you know, being... whatever. That *they* need to change. But... you know, when you think about it, the only person I can actually make change... is me. So I figured, I'd start there.

MELISSA

You're not a bad person, Paul. You know that, right?

PAUL

I know. But no one really thinks of themselves as a bad person. *(Beat.)* Besides, being kinder... more patient... these are all changes I want to make. And maybe even more important, all of this...

*(He motions to the table.)*

All this pain and loss... this crap that I've been lugging around for so many years... it's never done me any favors. Why not put it to some good use...

MELISSA

Wow. This... this is... I'm impressed, Paul. Really.

*(She looks over the piles of dust, and at another couple of cards.)*

Must have been a lot of work, putting all this together.

PAUL

Yeah, but... you know, that's why they call it sacrifice.

*(Lights out.)*