

IN THE SHADOW OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM
By
Robert Fieldsteel

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Cast of Characters

WOMAN - Late 20s to late 30s

MAN - 22 when with the WOMAN. Older when addressing the audience.

Note: I leave it to the actors and director as to how much older the MAN is when recounting this, i.e. when addressing the audience. It can be days, years, or decades later. I do not recommend a very pronounced change in his external/physical "age" when shifting back and forth between addressing the audience and addressing the WOMAN. I'd recommend that there should either be no change, i.e. he's still in the present addressing a memory, or the change is one that's more internal.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM

A WOMAN sits in a chair facing the audience. She has a dinner plate in her lap that she rubs with a cloth, rubs over and over in a circular motion. She rubs it throughout the play.

A young MAN sits in another chair, also facing the audience.

WOMAN

There's a layer of grit on all of our plates.

MAN

She said.

WOMAN

A thin film.

MAN

She said.

WOMAN

No matter how much I rub, it just shifts.

MAN

She said.

WOMAN

I can barely see it, but it's annihilating me.

MAN

She thought.

WOMAN

It gets on everything I taste.

MAN

She said.

(to her)

I see it too. It doesn't bother me.

WOMAN

You don't live with it.

MAN

What do you mean, I don't live with it?

WOMAN

If it doesn't bother you, you're not living with it.

MAN
It's an old house.

WOMAN
The plates aren't old. I bought them for us.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN
A big chunk of my paycheck.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN
Thirty-two fifty.

MAN
Exactly. There was no tax in New Hampshire.

WOMAN
Twenty-five percent of my paycheck.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN
I wish it could just be twenty-five percent of my heart.

MAN
I thought she thought.

WOMAN
Wouldn't that be nice.

MAN
I thought she thought.

WOMAN
Measure it out, save some for a rainy day.

MAN
I thought she thought.
(to her)
I love the plates.

WOMAN
Don't patronize me.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN

When you get your first paycheck, thirty-two fifty'll be chump change.

MAN

(to her)

You sound like an old Warner Brothers flick when you say that.

WOMAN

What.

MAN

Chump change.

WOMAN

Don't change the subject, chump.

MAN

Was that a smile?

WOMAN

That's why I bought them now.

MAN

She continued.

WOMAN

So they'd be worth something.

MAN

She said.

WOMAN

To us.

MAN

She said.

(to her)

It's hard to get grit off of white dishes.

WOMAN

The color doesn't matter. That's -- what do you think, certain colors attract dirt? Is that what you think?

MAN

No.

WOMAN

They're not white. They're ivory. I can't believe I did that. Freudian something.

MAN
Huh?

WOMAN
Ivory Tower.

MAN
Maybe you were thinking elephant tusks. Big curving elephant tusks.

WOMAN
That's not what I was thinking.

MAN
Freudian-wise. Subconsciously.

WOMAN
I was thinking bone.

He gives her a look.

WOMAN (cont'd)
Stop it. Bone china.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN
My grandmother gave my mother bone china.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN
They didn't have bone. So I got Ivory. That's what I was thinking. On the surface.

MAN
Bone skeleton? I thought. Bone death? I thought. Bone until death do us part? I thought. Smiling old people, skin and bones and happy?
(to her)
How long have you been rubbing that?

WOMAN
Next you'll tell me rubbing it will make it worse.

MAN
The thought crossed my mind. How long?

WOMAN
Since this morning.

MAN
Seriously.

WOMAN
Since this morning.

MAN
She said.
(Beat. To her)
They changed your shift?

WOMAN
No.

MAN
You didn't go to work?

WOMAN
This is work.

MAN
You were fine when I left this morning.

WOMAN
I'm fine now.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN
I have my priorities straight.

MAN
She said.

WOMAN
Work isn't everything. Job jobs. There's grit on all of our plates. Just think about that. You get up. Eat your muffin off of one of those plates. Rinse it off in the sink. The water slides off of the plate. The plate never feels the water. Put the dish in the rack. Forty minutes later you're in Bartlett Hall drawing net worth charts. With the other boys. And *I'm* supposed to be crazy?

MAN
I didn't say you were crazy.

WOMAN
You were thinking it.

MAN
It's good you know you're being strange.

WOMAN

Don't patronize me.

MAN

She said.

(to her)

Most guys wouldn't have rinsed the dish off. Most guys would have left it in the sink. Especially in the morning.

WOMAN

I wouldn't be doing this if you were like that.

MAN

She thought.

WOMAN

That's why I'm doing this.

MAN

She thought.

WOMAN

I haven't given up. You rinse it off and I notice that. I notice things like that. But the purpose isn't fulfilled. The ultimate purpose. The water slides into the drain. Frictionless. *Elusory*. Million dollar word, huh?

MAN

Million dollar.

WOMAN

I miss the water bed. When I first saw it, I thought it was dumb. I was glad when you said it was temporary. It wasn't yours. You'd have to give it back. Eventually. Later, though . . . Some afternoons. When I had the early shift. You'd be in class. And I would lie on my back. And sway with it. So lightly. My breasts would sway with it. Sway like liquid. At first it made my breasts feel old. Flip-flops. But then I let the sway go with my heart. And I felt how full they were. No old breasts. No dumb bed. *Childish*, maybe. Not dumb. You bought the new bed without me. Sealy Posturepedic. A good bed. Quality. It's not mine. I know it's not mine.

Beat.

MAN

I thought she thought.

(Beat. To her)

I have homework.

WOMAN

When are finals?

MAN

Next week.

WOMAN

Next week? I thought they were at least . . . ten days. Two weeks.

MAN

No. Next week.

WOMAN

Finals. Final finals. I'm very proud of you.

MAN

A proud tradition, I thought. Established 1769, I thought. The cream rises. A cut above. Several cuts. Bad blood, I thought. Royal interbreeding makes for hemophilia. We'll let you back, they said. Letter on lambskin. Tanned from the belly. We'll let you back. You needed time away. It's only time. You didn't go far. Only forty minutes. Just another part of the forest. Time well spent. You've grown up. You needed to grow. Up. That's why you left. We'll let you back. So you can finish.

(To her)

I love you. That's not patronizing, is it?

WOMAN

No.

MAN

She said.

(To her)

Then we're out in the world.

WOMAN

I'm already out in the world.

MAN

She said.

(To her)

Please put the dish down.

WOMAN

No.

MAN

She said.

WOMAN

It's only a matter of degrees. My cost benefit analysis comes up different from yours. That's all. If you lived in the Acoma Sky Village . . . I visited the Acoma Sky Village. Found it on my Trip-Tik. Seriously. Right on the Trip-Tik.

(MORE)

WOMAN(cont'd)

Oldest Continuously Inhabited Town in North America. Twenty-three mile loop off the Forty, west of Albuquerque. I was making good time. A man in the Acoma Sky Village could see, from the mesa, a small forest. Seven miles away. The nearest wood. Walk to the forest, pick up a log, bring it back. That was a good day's work, they said. It must have made a wonderful fire. It must have made the warmest fire.

(Pause)

You go upstairs. I'll do the dishes. It's the thinnest film. You have nothing to worry about. As long as you have the bat and the ball. You *have* the bat and the ball.

Beat.

MAN

She said.

BLACKOUT. END OF PLAY.