

Self-Inflicted
by
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CHARACTERS

TRENTON Mid-30s. Seriously depressed.

ANGELA Mid-30s. His girlfriend.
Trying to share his depression.

SETTING

Dining room of their house. The dining table has a long table cloth.

TIME

The present.

(A tight spot rises on TRENTON, seated. His shirt is off. ANGELA stands behind him, applying alcohol with cotton balls to his upper back. He speaks to the audience.)

TRENTON

I wake up. Here I am. My shirt off... in the living room. My... partner... Angela? ... is causing me pain. How did I get here?

(looks around room)

And I don't mean half-naked in the living room... I mean all of it. How does a life accumulate? Is it just a stone rolling down hill, gathering moss and squished bugs, whatever is in its path 'til it gets to the bottom? Is it choices? Fate? Past-life karma? And why am I so unhappy? This confusion I'm having... it's not new... Wait... hey... pain is really... painful! Ow!

(The lights shoot up to full and he turns to ANGELA.)

ANGELA

Shh. Keep still, Trenton. Almost done... Band Aid time.

(She applies Band Aids to his back.)

TRENTON

I don't really believe in sanitizing wounds. That's you. I never had cotton balls or rubbing alcohol when I was a bachelor.

ANGELA

You're lucky to have survived until I found you.

(pause, looking at his back)

These look like fingernail cuts. Little curves.

TRENTON

You don't think... I mean... nobody has ever really wanted me but you.

ANGELA

I think you did it.

TRENTON

But—

ANGELA

No, I mean cut yourself. With you own nails. You having an affair?

TRENTON

I'm not!

ANGELA

And I didn't do it, so that's the answer – they're self-inflicted.

TRENTON

(putting on his shirt)

I don't remember doing it.

ANGELA

Why are you attacking yourself? Not happy?

TRENTON

No, I'm happy.

ANGELA

Are you sure? You don't seem happy. You seem stressed.

TRENTON

Just about the mystery wounds, that's all.

ANGELA

You were stressed before them.

TRENTON

Was I?

ANGELA

You were.

TRENTON

It's Christmas. Who could be stressed at Christmas?

ANGELA

Everyone is stressed at Christmas.

TRENTON

They are?

ANGELA

It's stressful.

TRENTON

Oh. Then I guess it's Christmas' fault.

ANGELA
You were stressed before that.

TRENTON
Okay... There's some stress at work.

ANGELA
Tell me about it.

TRENTON
It doesn't matter, Angela. It doesn't mean anything.

ANGELA
Trenton—

TRENTON
It doesn't matter.

ANGELA
(cleaning up)
Maybe you should wear mittens to protect yourself while you sleep.

TRENTON
Shut up.

ANGELA
Seriously.

TRENTON
Seriously... shut up. I'm not going to be like one of those cats they make wear the reverse witch hats to keep them from biting themselves. I seem to have survived the first attack, let's see if it gets worse...

(The lights fade to a single spot downstage. Ominous music rises. ANGELA enters the spotlight.)

ANGELA
I'm never going to date someone based on their good intentions again. It's like being a Red Sox fan... yeah, it felt good once they finally won the World Series, but feeling like a winner once in hundred years? That's just too much time spent following losers. I met Trenton at his company's picnic. I was there on a blind date with this horrible little man in sales... and Trenton was just so... uncomfortable with everyone there... he seemed like a man I could keep at home. Safe. But his endless misery is my endless misery...

(She returns back to the main part of the stage as the lights rise. TRENTON is sitting at the table. There is a huge gash on his forehead that she starts stitching up. It's all right for this wound to be stagey and fake; realism isn't required or really even suggested.)

ANGELA

This is a huge gash. How did you not wake up in the middle of doing this to yourself?

TRENTON

No idea.

ANGELA

You really should go to the hospital.

TRENTON

No, please. Those places scare me.

ANGELA

They actually know what they're doing. I'm just faking here... this is going to leave a scar.

(pause)

How is work going now?

(pause)

Trenton?

TRENTON

(trying to be off-hand)

It's horrible. A little piece of my soul dies every day I go in. Don't...

ANGELA

What?

TRENTON

Don't need me to tell you about it. You're my yang, work's the yin. You're the light and goodness, it's the sucking blackness. I guess I have to have both, but they don't have to meet.

ANGELA

I think you've missed the point of Eastern spiritualism.

TRENTON

I haven't missed it. I've just drawn my own conclusions.

ANGELA

We haven't been together so long that I should have to be your nurse. That's normally reserved for people who get married and grow old together... all right. This is going to hurt a lot.

(She removes the end of the thread from his forehead with her teeth.)

TRENTON

Holy crap! Ow! Ow! You weren't shitting me. Crap! Ow! I need to... lie down.

ANGELA

Use the floor. The sheets are in the wash, and if you get bloodstains on the mattress, that's the end of it. I'll get you a towel for a pillow.

(She exits. He stares ahead, dazed. She reenters and puts a folded towel on the ground.)

Here you go.

(TRENTON collapses, his head landing on the towel.)

TRENTON

Okaygoodyeslikeit.

ANGELA

Whoa, are you all right?

(pause)

Trenton?

TRENTON

What? Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, fine, fine, I'm fine.

ANGELA

You don't sound fine.

TRENTON

Just resting my eyes. I'm up. I'll get up.

ANGELA

You don't have to get up.

TRENTON

Yeah, work, gotta go in.

ANGELA

It's Saturday, Trenton.

TRENTON

Right... Just a few things to do around the office... not a full day...

ANGELA

You can't go in to work, you've lost a lot of blood.

TRENTON

No hospital!

ANGELA

No hospital.

TRENTON

I need you... I need a hand up.

ANGELA

Just stay down, Trenton. Stay down. I'll take care of you, but you have to help me.

TRENTON

But I've got to go in!

ANGELA

Sometimes we can't do things that we've got to do, and that's got to be good enough for the people who need us to do them. Do you want me to call the office?

TRENTON

There's no one else there. It's Saturday.

ANGELA

That's right, it is, so just lie there. Get better.

TRENTON

(pause)

You're so good to me.

ANGELA

I try...

(She walks downstage and the lights on the rest of the stage fade away.)

ANGELA

But what's the point! It's not like he HAS something for me. No time, no emotion... nothing! He's like some bear trap that's snapped on my leg and I can't get away from him without gnawing it off... and the guilt! His needs! He makes me feel like... like I'm a bad person. I'm taking the weekend at my parents' place. They managed to keep their marriage going for over forty years, and I'm sure they had their valleys. I just need to toughen up, and be the best partner I can be!

(The lights rise, revealing TRENTON's living head on the kitchen table. The rest of his headless body lies on the ground. ANGELA sees him and...)

Aaaaaahhhhhh!!!

TRENTON

(completely loopy)

Angela! There you are. I was getting worried. How was your mother? You know... you and I... we haven't been apart for more than a day in months... I missed you.

ANGELA

What is, what has, are you, what...

TRENTON

Are you all right?

ANGELA

What happened to you?

TRENTON

What? Oh... that. I had another one of my little night accidents.

ANGELA

Christ!

TRENTON

It's not as bad as it looks.

ANGELA

Oh really!

TRENTON

Very little blood! None on the sheets, just a little on my pillow case.

ANGELA

I don't see how you got... your... HEAD... to the table.

TRENTON

Walked, silly.

ANGELA

You are going to the hospital. You can't live this way. I can't live this way.

TRENTON

No hospital! No doctors! I'm not crazy... you think I'm crazy?

ANGELA

I think you're sick. Very sick. You need help. But I can't, I'm not going to be the one to give it to you.

TRENTON

What I need is for you to calm down. I'm fine! What I need is for you to get off my back. What I need is for you to understand!

ANGELA

Oh, Trenton... I'm leaving.

TRENTON

So soon?

ANGELA

No, you're not getting it. I'm leaving you. I'm not coming back.

TRENTON

I'm not getting you here... you're saying...

ANGELA

That I'm leaving you.

TRENTON

Because of a few, small—

ANGELA

Because of your job! It's killing you, and you still love it more than me.

TRENTON

It's really not that important.

ANGELA

Why won't you even lie for me? Tell me you can't talk about it because it's classified, it's top secret. You want nothing more than to share it with me, but it would put me in danger.

TRENTON

Hah. No... nothing like that. It's just not very interesting.

ANGELA

Goodbye, Trenton.

TRENTON

No, please.

ANGELA

I'll come back later for my things. No, I want my toiletries now.

(She exits. TRENTON speaks in a barely audible voice.)

TRENTON

Stay. Stay, you have to. My job... it can't matter to you. It can't have any part of you. It's already taken the best of me. I don't even know what I do. It's meaningless. I shuffle paper. It's pointless, and that makes me... pointless. I'm always behind, and it's always getting worse, and I just have to keep moving as fast as I can and hope that no one notices... I don't deserve you... but please stay. Please.

(She returns with a small toiletries bag. He looks at her.)

ANGELA

I'll call you, Trenton.

TRENTON

I'll try to answer.

(She leaves.)

Okay, body, time to get up... come on, get up... come here to me... please come here... don't make me... please get up. We need to get our head on straight...

(His voice fades away with the lights.)

Come here... come here... come here...

(End of play.)