

SIX DEAD BODIES DUCT-TAPED TO A MERRY-GO-ROUND

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CHARACTERS

WINSTON 50s. Grizzled truck driver.

TOBY Mid-20s. A soldier.

SETTING

The play begins in a Reno truck stop parking lot, then primarily takes place in the cab of Winston's semi-trailer truck.

COSTUMES

Winston wears a greasy, faded mechanic's jumpsuit. Toby wears camouflage fatigues and carries a large duffel bag.

TIME

Fall, 2009.

(Lights rise on WINSTON, leaning out the open door of his truck's cab. He is eavesdropping on TOBY, who paces anxiously, talking into a cell phone, and doesn't notice WINSTON watching him.)

TOBY

Come on, pick up. Pick up, Kelsey... no, I DON'T want to leave another message... uh, hey. It's Toby. Message number three. I'm still in Reno... uh, I guess I'll just try to find another way home, and see you when I get there. Give me a call when you get this.

(pause)

This really sucks, Kels. Call me.

(He puts the phone in his pocket, chewing the side of his thumbnail.)

WINSTON

You need a ride, soldier?

TOBY

Yeah... I guess I do.

WINSTON

You're not a cop, are you?

TOBY

Sorry?

WINSTON

Where you heading?

TOBY

California. San Jose.

WINSTON

Well, it's a little out of the way... I'm going to Los Angeles...

TOBY

Yeah. Don't worry about it.

WINSTON

No, no. I can get you there. I'm just thinking out loud about what route to take.

TOBY

If you could even get me close...

WINSTON

Hop in.

(TOBY crosses around the front of the truck and gets in.)

TOBY

Thanks.

WINSTON

Name's Winston.

(pause)

You're not carrying any guns, are you? I don't mean to pry, but I've got some materials in back that, uh... let's say they don't mix well with firearms. Company policy.

TOBY

Don't worry about me.

WINSTON

So. You like music, officer?

TOBY

Yeah, I guess.

WINSTON

Yeah to the music, or yeah to the officer?

TOBY

What are you getting at?

WINSTON

Nothing. I thought you said you were a cop.

TOBY

I'm not a cop. I'm an Army corporal.

WINSTON

What about before the service?

TOBY

Construction, I guess.

WINSTON

Good. That's good honest work, right there.

TOBY

I guess. I'm ready to get back to it, ready to get back anyway.

WINSTON

Coming home from Iraq?

TOBY

Afghanistan.

WINSTON

How was it?

TOBY

Awesome. It was great. Really fun.

WINSTON

Wow... really?

TOBY

No.

(pause)

Cold. It was really cold. I didn't expect that. People were burning so much garbage in Jalalabad to keep warm, the air turned black. Couldn't hardly breathe.

WINSTON

Jesus.

(TOBY pulls the truck out onto the highway.)

TOBY

Coughed so hard, I gave myself a hernia. But I'm home for good. I don't have to go back. I haven't seen my wife in fourteen months, so, you know... that should be fun... she was supposed to be here.

WINSTON

Hope she's all right. Or, you know, mostly all right.

TOBY

What?

WINSTON

You don't want her to be hurt or anything, but something needs to have gone wrong, or you'll be pissed that she didn't pick you up.

TOBY

Look—

WINSTON

It's only human.

TOBY

Can we not talk about this? I'm sure there's a good reason she wasn't there.

WINSTON

Consider it dropped.

(pause)

Listen, you seem like a trustworthy guy, and you're not a cop, so I'm happy to drive you... but there's something I need for you to do for me.

TOBY

Whoa. Easy, dude. I'm not going to polish your knob or whatever. I don't need a ride that bad.

WINSTON

Aw hell, that ain't what I meant... Why would you think THAT? I look like some sorta sexual deviant to you?

TOBY

Oh, I just... you know, you hear stories... about truckers...

WINSTON

Happily taken for the last nine years, thank you.

TOBY

I'm sorry.

WINSTON

Jeez, like I'm some kind of weirdo.

TOBY

I said I'm sorry. Just a misunderstanding.

WINSTON

Okay. Forget it.

(pause)

Glad we got beyond that.

(pause)

Know what I'm hauling in the back of this rig?

TOBY

No.

WINSTON

It's a 'body bus.' I'm taking a load of cadavers to UCLA. Dead bodies. For research.

TOBY

That doesn't scare me.

WINSTON

Does me. I ain't never hauled so many bodies.

(pause)

WINSTON cont.

Actually, I've never pulled this gig before. Not bodies, never. I used to haul gas for BP. Bigger truck, less money. Go figure. The point is... I've never had an opportunity like this before.

TOBY

Opportunity to what?

WINSTON

I've got this idea. We'll stop in Sacramento on the way to your place. There's a park on the West side, just off the railroad tracks... Sam Combs Park. We'll just stop there, get the bodies out of the back—

TOBY

Pull over. Pull over. I'm not fooling around with any dead bodies, no way!

WINSTON

But I've got this idea... Listen.

TOBY

Are you kidding me?

WINSTON

What are you talking about?

TOBY

Necrophilia! I'm not doing it.

WINSTON

Sex with dead bodies? That's where your mind goes first, son? Is this what post traumatic stress is like? The first thing you think of when corpses come up is having sex with them?

TOBY

Then what are you talking about?

WINSTON

We're gonna duct tape 'em to the merry-go-round.

TOBY

Um... what?

WINSTON

I got this new digital video camera. My lady and me... we needed money. We figured we'd be able to do something with the camera... you know... home videos.

TOBY

Oh.

WINSTON

Yeah, so that's not panning out.

TOBY

If she's not a hell of a lot better looking than you—

WINSTON

We've been keeping our eyes open for opportunities. That's what this is, man. That's exactly what this is. We'll film it and put it on the internet and charge people to watch it... five bucks a pop, maybe ten. You get a couple thousand people... that's millions of dollars. That's a lot of dough.

TOBY

You planning on sharing the proceeds?

WINSTON

You need a ride. I need a hand. Two hands. I'm on the up and up.

TOBY

No way, man. Sorry.

WINSTON

Someone's gonna help me. If that someone isn't you... I gotta let you off.

(pause)

Your wife call you back yet?

TOBY

No.

WINSTON

Don't suppose she's schtupping the mailman, do you? What do you military boys call that... when a guy moves in on your girl while you're out killing the bad guys...

TOBY

A Jody.

WINSTON

Yeah, a Jody, that's right. I mean, for all you know, she could be banging someone—

TOBY

Shut up!

WINSTON

Just trying to make conversation.

TOBY

(pause)

You ever try to actually move a body before?

WINSTON

Nope.

TOBY

They're heavy. Like bags-of-concrete heavy.

WINSTON

A stiff's a stiff. You look strong... hernia still bothering you?

TOBY

No, surgery was over a month ago. Look, what if... what happens if we get caught?

WINSTON

Listen, if you see blue lights, just run. Run, and don't look back.

TOBY

I'm not saying I'll... Jesus. Who are these people anyway? And how would you like it if someone roped your dead body to a seesaw?

WINSTON

Merry-go-round. See-saw wouldn't work... we're making a movie. We need some action.

TOBY

That makes sense. There wouldn't be any up and down with two stiffs on a teeter-totter.

WINSTON

(laughs)

We don't have much of a special effects budget.

TOBY

Winston, I can't go do this. I... I see what you're saying, and I can picture it, and I can even see a bunch of idiots paying to watch it... God help us... but it's just so, so lame... I mean... disrespectful.

WINSTON

What, to them? They don't give two shits at this point. They donated their bodies to science. Science. There's nothing we're going to do that's worse than what those doctors down at UCLA got in store. It's a chop shop down there. We're just gonna drag 'em, strap 'em, spin 'em, film 'em, and toss 'em back in the truck. Good as new.

TOBY

You should keep their faces covered, though... don't you think?

WINSTON

Maybe.

TOBY

I mean, if a family member sees it... they've got detectives for that sort of thing.

WINSTON

Oh yeah... hadn't thought... but will people pay to watch it if they can't see the dead faces?

TOBY

That's a risk we're going to have to take.

WINSTON

“We” are?

(pause)

I can live with that... hell, that’s good... anonymity. Yeah. Like “we’re all faceless in death... all the same.” Puts a good spin on it.

TOBY

Speaking of spin... how are you planning to get the thing started?

WINSTON

I got a rope in back. I figure I’ll wrap it around the base and then tie the end to the bumper. When I say action, you hit the gas and let ‘em fly.

TOBY

This is insane. This is a really, really stupid idea.

WINSTON

Oh come on... it’ll take an hour, two max. You’ll be home before the sun’s up.

*(TOBY looks out the window, then pulls out his cell phone.
He stares at it.)*

TOBY

Why do you need the money?

WINSTON

This trucking thing may look glamorous, but it barely covers rent. Mona is... well, Mona can’t work any more.

TOBY

Your wife?

WINSTON

Not actually married, but for all intents, yeah, she’s my life.

TOBY

What’s wrong with her?

WINSTON

She swerved to miss a kid with her car. Hit a tree instead. She can't walk any more. Her spine snapped.

TOBY

I thought you said you guys made, uh, videos...

WINSTON

Well, yeah. We still "do it," if that's what you're asking.

TOBY

How is it?

WINSTON

None of your goddamn business.

TOBY

Sorry.

WINSTON

Even though my old lady's a cripple, we're doing great. How's your marriage, huh? What's shaking with Miss San Jose? Been having troubles? Not picking you up is pretty cold.

TOBY

We got married a couple of months before I left.

WINSTON

Pregnant?

TOBY

No, no, I loved her.

WINSTON

You can have both of those.

TOBY

That's not what I'm saying... I just mean, I love her, like crazy... she sent me this care package, for my birthday. It wasn't anything special, you know, of value. But there was this... coffee mug, and it looked just like this other one she'd given me when we were dating. Nothing big, but it was my favorite, until one day, she was drinking coffee, standing in the kitchen, and the mug slipped out of her hands, and smash! We both looked up at each other and yelled Mazel Tov!

(pause)

That was it. I knew. I mean, I'd known before, but that was the... the whatever-moment.

WINSTON

I know what you mean.

TOBY

So she sends me another mug, just like it, only she'd painted "Mazel Tov, Toby" on the side in gold glitter pen.

WINSTON

I get it.

TOBY

I don't know where she is. I talked to her a week ago and everything seemed fine.

WINSTON

I was just kidding before, you know.

TOBY

About the dead bodies and the merry-go-round?

WINSTON

No, that's on. All that Jody stuff. I didn't mean to say... Lighten up, brother. She'll call. Girl like that? She'll call.

(pause)

It's not always all yellow ribbons when you get home, you know.

(pause)

I'm gonna stop at this exit up here.

TOBY

I can't.

WINSTON

Can't stop?

TOBY

The merry-go-round. I can't do it. I'm sorry. You can just let me off when we stop.

WINSTON

It's all right... I'll still take you home. It was a stupid idea anyway... you were right.

TOBY

Funny, though.

WINSTON

Yeah.

TOBY

Maybe we should just pretend that you were joking. Trying to trick me into going along with you.

WINSTON

(pulling over)

Yeah, I can't believe you bought that.

TOBY

You sure got me!

WINSTON

Like I'd do that. You're crazy. I'm going to use the head.

(TOBY shakes his head. His cell phone goes off. He checks the caller ID... he looks up at WINSTON, who smiles, then gets out of the truck and exits. TOBY gets out, stretching as he answers.)

TOBY

Kels, thank God, are you okay?

(pause)

No, no, it's all right, I got a ride. Some weird trucker.

(pause)

Okay, what is it?

(long pause; his jaw drops)

I've got a what?

(pause)

Yeah... yeah, of course you should have told me! What if something had happened to me? I would never have known... it's a girl?

(pause)

Well, yeah, Kels, I'm kind of mad. It's been over nine months. That baby had better have teeth by now. I'm sorry, but—

(pause)

I don't know WHAT to imply, all right?

(pause)

Yeah, of course I'm still coming home. Of course. I just...

(WINSTON enters. TOBY turns away from him. WINSTON gets back in the cab of the truck, muttering.)

WINSTON

I can take a hint.

TOBY

I can't talk now... look. I'll be home in a few hours.

(TOBY hangs up and gets back in the truck. WINSTON pulls out. WINSTON finally can't hold back any longer.)

WINSTON

Well?! What'd she say?

TOBY

I'm a father.

WINSTON

Well... I'll be damned... congratulations, Mazel Tov... there might be a cigar in the glove box... um... so are you... are you THE father?

TOBY

She said she didn't tell me because she didn't want to make it harder. On me.

WINSTON

It would have.

TOBY

That's messed up, though, right? You don't wait till the night your husband's getting back after fourteen months and say "oh yeah, I almost forgot, we had a kid, SURPRISE!!!"

WINSTON

You're looking at this all wrong. What do you suppose it was like for her? Better yet, think of how you would have felt, knowing you were missing the whole thing. That's the sort of worry that sucks you dry, leaves you with nothing. I can tell you from experience. It means she loves you. Making that kind of sacrifice? That's what it means.

TOBY

But... it feels wrong. SHE was wrong.

WINSTON

Maybe she was. But a wrong thing ain't always so wrong when it's done for the right reasons. She did it to protect you. Love's a pretty damn good reason to go and do something stupid.

TOBY

(pause)

Her name's Caroline. She's got a tooth.

WINSTON

Wonderful.

TOBY

(pause)

I'm going to do it.

WINSTON

That's the spirit.

TOBY

I mean the dead bodies, the video... let's do it.

WINSTON

You serious?

TOBY

Let's do it, Winston. Let's go duct tape these bastards to a merry-go round. How I'm feeling right now... it'd be weird NOT to tape corpses to playground equipment.

WINSTON

Mona's gonna shit. We're gonna be rich.

TOBY

We should buy some antiseptic to spray it down afterward.

WINSTON

Good idea. You're a thoughtful kind of person.

TOBY

You got a title yet? You gotta have something catchy, you know. Something that'll get people's attention, without giving too much away. How about "Circle of Death?" Or... "Cadaver Carousel!"

WINSTON

(quietly)

I've got a title.

TOBY

Something that gets across the essence of the thing... "Life After Death," no... "Joy in the Afterlife," no... how about "The Fun Never Ends?"

WINSTON

I've already got the perfect title.

TOBY

What?

WINSTON

I'm gonna call it "Six Dead Bodies Duct-Taped to a Merry-Go-Round."

(TOBY stares at him, then nods and looks out the window as the lights fade.)

TOBY

That works, too...

(End of play.)