

EN EL ABISMO SUAVE

by

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CHARACTERS

CHAMPION

Sunglasses.

SCUM

Wears a collar.

BETHANY

Like a plastic flower in a watered vase.

SETTING

A sauna-like pit. Curtained. Dark. Yet--somehow--cozy. Vaguely reminiscent of a popular brunch establishment. Or the deck of a sailboat. Constant humming and sloshing.

TIME

Present.

(A soft floor. Dark walls. Little light. Curtains. CHAMPION is center--near the ground. All fours. SCUM circles. Both are assembling. The end is unclear. Frustration. Worry. Redness. They work with bands of varied colors--sizes. Many bands. Rubber bands. Strewn about in corners and crevasses and cracks--in the clear. As if poured from a crumbled pitcher. Or thrown by a milk-drunk child. A feeling of humidity, of heat, and of booze. Running juice. A pulsing rhythm. That bloody pain. Anger. Sarcasm. Sweat.)

CHAMPION

(Throwing his arms up.)

That's it. I'm through.

(Picking up a rubber band.)

Unprepared. That's it--unprepared. Or there's something I'm missing. I don't know. I don't remember.

(Beat.)

It's not like there was any prep beyond the hype. We were just shot in here. No instruction manual. No nothing!

SCUM

Beyond the hype?

CHAMPION

Yes--the hype. The yelling. The cheers. The rushing, grabbing, tossing, throwing. Eating. Bedding. And undoing. Undoing...

SCUM

(Reminiscing.)

Ah, the eating. And the heat. Swimming.

(Thinking a moment.)

You're the Champion. I thought you would know how to proceed.

CHAMPION

Yes, I'm the Champion. But that's irrelevant now. What are we supposed to do? We are here, and we are lost. Look at this place.

(They examine their surroundings. A drip. Drip. A quiver. And scream. Distant. Humming beneath. The clanging of glasses. The pouring of juice.)

CHAMPION

Did you hear that?

(Getting up from the ground.)

That doesn't help us!

(Shouting to the walls.)

You hear? That doesn't help!

(To SCUM, with some sense of giving up.)

Do you remember anything?

SCUM

Not a thing. Swimming, eating? I'm only here to help, remember?

CHAMPION

It's maddening. Not a single thing is coming back to me. It doesn't make sense. I remember, well, the before--the hype, as we already went over. I remember landing. The pain. The burst. The sex... Sex? Is it blood? But the middle--the illusive middle. What was it? What happened in the middle?

(Beat.)

I wonder if it even matters.

(SCUM takes up the rubber bands in his hands. Ties them in knots.)

SCUM

Does this look right?

CHAMPION

I don't know.

(Scratching his stomach. Poking at the walls. The hum grows.)

Could there be a way out? They never said we had to stay.

(SCUM pays him no mind--occupied with the knots. Twists of concentration. Like cutting fruit. CHAMPION looks up.)

CHAMPION (Continued)

Maybe we could tie the bands together and pull ourselves up. How many of those do you have?

SCUM

Not sure--ten, fifteen.

CHAMPION

That's not enough. How fast do you think you can tie them?

(Beat.)

Hello?

SCUM

(Struggling with a more complex knot. Taking his time.)

When we're finished, do you think it will like to sail?

CHAMPION

What?

SCUM

Will it like to sail? Like on a boat. On the ocean.

CHAMPION

Have you lost your mind? You're Scum. We don't know what we're doing here. We're unprepared. Sailing is out of the question.

SCUM

I've always wanted to sail. All we've done is swim.

(Beat.)

Look. A sailor's knot.

(SCUM holds up the paltry sailor's knot for CHAMPION to see.)

CHAMPION

That doesn't matter. Tie faster.

(From above--a portrait. Increased humming. Clattering to the ground. Wooden frame. Stiff. Lacquered. The face--a blurry haze. Rushed, splattered, and vague. Yet, despite its rigidity, human. CHAMPION and SCUM exchange a glance. Lose the bands. Rush the painting.)

CHAMPION

(Groping.)

What is it?

SCUM

Look at the lines, the background. I think it might be--

CHAMPION

I can't make anything out. Do you see any appetizers? Drinks? What about sides.

SCUM

It's a painting, not a menu. It's a person--

(Beat.)

They're standing.

CHAMPION

You mean there's no table?

SCUM

No. But that's... blood? A bloody napkin?

CHAMPION

Right.

(Feeling the frame.)

Is it broken? Any cracks?

SCUM

It's whole.

CHAMPION

Good.

(Snapping his fingers. Commanding SCUM like a dog.)

Get the knots--this is something. We have something!

(SCUM takes up the knotted rubber bands. Attempts to form a shape. CHAMPION holds the painting for him. Adjusts at random. A struggle. With shaking urgency and teeth.)

CHAMPION (Continued)

No! You're not getting it. No, that's different. Focus! Are you even looking at it? Let me see those.

(CHAMPION takes the rubber bands from SCUM's hands. Another scream. Stoppage. Humming to new heights. Thrusts the painting at SCUM. Looks for a moment. Struggles.)

SCUM

Do you think that--

CHAMPION

Wait. Stop. Give it back.

(Under his breath.)

You really are Scum.

(CHAMPION tosses the knotted bands. Takes a handful of untouched ones from the ground. Wraps the bands around the

painting, covering the picture and frame. A crescendo. Wave. Breeze and noise. The ocean.)

CHAMPION (Continued)

Help--hurry!

(From behind a curtain, BETHANY appears. She walks with incredible authority. Dripping and chewing. Yet--some amount of reserve. Holds a small sphere: an orange. Bouncy and juicy and distant. The hum quiets. CHAMPION and SCUM don't notice.)

BETHANY

(Loudly.)

Are you who they've sent? Are you the Champion?

(CHAMPION and SCUM startle at the sound. Turn violently.)

CHAMPION

Who are you?

BETHANY

I am Bethany.

CHAMPION

Bethany?

BETHANY

Yes. And you're doing that wrong. The portrait is only meant as a guideline. It's not the thing the itself.

SCUM

(Oddly hurt.)

What's it supposed to be then?

BETHANY

(Tossing the orange up and down in her hand.)

That is yet to be determined. Only that it is supposed

to be something. Our job doesn't entail the aftermath--
whether it amounts to anything significant--only the
creation of it.

CHAMPION

The creation of what? We only just got here. And
there's no way out.

BETHANY

You are correct. There is no way out.

(SCUM makes to speak, but is cut off.)

CHAMPION

Will we die here?

BETHANY

Of course.

(CHAMPION thinks on this--now better
understanding his task. SCUM is worried.
Reality hadn't yet caressed him.)

BETHANY (Continued)

(Wry.)

Look--give me the portrait. I will show you,
'Champion.'

(CHAMPION and SCUM relent. Hand her the
portrait--plucking the bands from the
frame. Dripping onto the floor. BETHANY
hangs the portrait on the wall behind
them. An altar. Or a museum. Visible and
presented. Watching with blurred
trajectory. SCUM notices a change in
himself--a turn, an anger, a sudden
realization that he might no longer be
needed. There will be no sailing. Or
drink. Or juice.)

SCUM

No.

(Rips the portrait from the wall and

throws it to the ground.)
 No, I'm needed here too. It was to like to sail.
 Sailing, remember?

CHAMPION

We arrived together. We survived the fall and stuck by each other for this brief piece--but the other piece has made herself apparent. She is the menu. Not the portrait. You must go.

SCUM

We knew of no other before. It was only you and I.

BETHANY

That doesn't matter--take it, the portrait. We don't need it, Scum. The Champion and I will proceed alone.

(Looking to CHAMPION. Raising the orange to eye level.)

I have all we need right here.

(From offstage, BETHANY retrieves a table and two chairs. Sets them for sitting. Sloppy and expensive. Place mats, blankets--too many utensils. No napkins. Heat. Wetness. CHAMPION sits. BETHANY follows suit.)

CHAMPION

(To SCUM.)

Stay or sail--you aren't needed. I remember now. This looks familiar. Like the table.

(SCUM stands alone and confused--head frozen, lip twitching. From the floor, BETHANY pinches a rubber band and pulls it around the orange. Across the table, CHAMPION glares and repeats. Together they begin wrapping the orange in layers and layers of bands. SCUM takes the portrait in his hands.)

BETHANY

(To CHAMPION.)

I thought the bands would be more plentiful. But this will be sufficient. We are well equipped.

CHAMPION

Are there usually more?

BETHANY

If there were, I wouldn't know. I've only heard stories--vague instructions. There was prep, but it was lifeless and brutal. Regulatory. And cold. I was given a manual and I lost it. I can't remember anymore. Maybe I just hoped.

SCUM

(Chiming in.)

Am I not enough?

BETHANY

We have all we need right here.

(SCUM moves downstage. Like a bat. Thinking and sighing. A hope. Or idea. Scrapes the paint from the portrait. Fingernails--slowly, unrevealing--while BETHANY and CHAMPION quicken their pace. Silent. Determined. Smothering the orange and creating. Moaning. Little spurts of juice from the pores.)

SCUM

(Aside. Still scratching away at the paint.)

When I think of the future--of sailing off, my stomach tied in knots. I think of stages at the table of morning, waiting for the meal to be served. Orange juice on the table. The brunch menu having been removed. The odd one on the other side of the lovely couple.

(Rubbing away.)

First, we celebrate the birthday--the moment rhythm comes out. And it is supposed to be something. It's all

unknown--life like ripe fruit--and we celebrate a child. A baptism. All these gatherings. Then there is Communion. The first drink and dousing in fire and water all around with people and family. And then there is prom. There is graduation--and sometimes there are two. But it is nevertheless a feast with tables and food and juice and--and next is the wedding, the union of vine and seed. With the yelling. The cheers. The rushing, grabbing, tossing, throwing. Eating. Bedding. And undoing. Undoing... Preparing the sails for the voyage. Looking out at the sea and finding the road and clouds and sky--the boats--to be full of funeral arrangements and funerals themselves. Maybe ten, fifteen.

(Recognizing the portrait.)

Until you find yourself at two funerals a day. One of which is for a man you've never met--with the wife and mother there, as well as the children and brothers and sister--all locked up in a wooden box. Curtains. A smooth, soft pit. No tears. And the other for a husk lying in a white bed. The rosary strangling his hands. Shit wiped clean. Many tears. A bloody napkin still on the table beside him. The last gathering. Truly, you only then know your age.

(Hanging the portrait now--it is of SCUM. SCUM in the picture. SCUM on the wall. Revealed and standing. Weeping. The portrait of him.)

Finally, sailing away. A sailor's knot. I have learned we will die here. We will sail away from this soft, curtained abyss. Dripping and quivering. Hyped and humming. Tying and pulling ourselves up--sailing, swimming, and a happy, happy birthday to you, darling baby.

(A blaze of focus--BETHANY and CHAMPION rapidly wrap band after rubber band around the orange. Clutching the table. Bound. Tight. Bursting. Quivering. Clinging for satisfaction. Dripping with

stray juice. Sweetness. Messy hands and tangled hair. Sweat. Blood breath. The morning-after brunch. SCUM hovers in the back. Clinging to the curtain--waiting to be called. Yet ignoring. Another hum begins. Low, low, low.)

CHAMPION

Scum, help us clean.

(SCUM detaches from the curtain--as the server, the waiter. The busser. BETHANY holds the banded orange before her. Raising. Like Jesus.)

BETHANY

It is done. I can feel it inside me.

(The decision--a snap. Severed line. Moving past the table, ignoring CHAMPION and BETHANY completely, SCUM lies on the soft, soft floor--fetal. Wet. Eyes closed. Reaching out his hand. Grasping for the audience. Above--the orange. Laughing. Fulfilled. Behind--the portrait. Looming. Scratched. To the side--CHAMPION. Waiting. Parched.)

CHAMPION

(To SCUM. With resent.)

I asked for your help. We need napkins.

(SCUM reaches further.)

CHAMPION (Continued)

We aren't through yet!

(SCUM pulls his hand in against his chest. BETHANY holds the orange--blocking the face of the portrait. Blocking SCUM's reflection. Hum. Juice. Glasses. Hum.)

CHAMPION (Continued)

You hear?

(Beat.)

Hello?

(SCUM screams. Clutching his stomach--
tied in knots. Sailor's knots. As loud
as humanly possible. Loud enough to
deafen. To shatter glass. To milk the
juice of an orange. Loud enough to wash
himself clean. Loud enough for napkins
for CHAMPION. Loud enough to raise
BETHANY higher and thrust her out of the
pit. Loud enough to sail away.)

(Blackout.)