RED SKY

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Characters

M — A large man. Older.

O — Another man, smaller.

Note

1. The general lack of stage direction should not be construed to mean that nothing happens on stage. (There is a brawl, for example, on page 6.)

A WHITE ROOM.

M

I swear the sky was red yesterday. I could see it, through the bars. A thin sliver. Red. Red sky. That's crazy, right? That can't be true. The sky is blue. Everyone knows that. The sky is blue.

O

Red sometimes.

M

What? Red? No, blue. You're here, are you. Again? What were you doing just now?

O

I heard you say the sky was blue.

M

Should be blue. Was red. Orange, almost.

O

Yes.

M

But before that.

O

It's black. Blank. I woke up. Nothing before.

M

But the sky is blue, right? When you see it?

O

The sky is sometimes red. Orange, almost.

M

Is that *right*? Is that *normal*?

O

I don't know. It is.

M

It seems wrong. Which means if I saw it, I must have imagined it. Or must be crazy. I could be mad.

O

It's possible.

M

An impressive sunset. Could make the sky red.

O

Perhaps.

M

But I was looking straight up. The gap was up, I mean. Where I saw the sky. Sunset doesn't make the whole sky red.

O

No.

M

I don't think it was sunset. I think it was early.

O

Sunrise.

M

Not that early. Noon.

O

You don't know.

M

I don't think it was sunset. Or sunrise.

O

Smoke.

M

Perhaps.

O

Bombs.

M

Maybe.

O

Blood.

(beat.)

M

In the sky?

(beat.)

Perhaps.

(beat.)

O

I remember it being dark.

M

The sky?

O

There was nothing. Then I woke up. Before the nothing—

M

Dark.

O

Some confusion. I screamed.

M

Screamed?

O

I think.

M

Happy?

O

I don't remember.

M

Scared.

O

Perhaps.

M

(Beat.)

Do you remember the rocket?

O

The rocket?

M

The Mars rocket. When it took off. Later the landing? On TV.

O

I remember my childhood.

M

The sky was blue then.

O

The rockets made it red.

M

Just for a little while. After they were gone.

O

It was blue.

M

Did you stare at Mars?

O

Then? Yes. Every night, until.

M

A year of nights. Only.

O

Mars is red.

M

Mars doesn't feel like this. No one lives on Mars.

O

The astronauts made it to Mars. Before.

M

No one's been since. I don't remember a trip. To this place. Not a long trip. Not a short trip even.

O

You wouldn't remember.

M

Not even hazy. Not even haze which could have been a trip.

O

I don't remember anything.

M

But you remember your childhood.

O

I remember the rocket.

M

What else?

O

I remember books.

M

And libraries?

O

I remember university.

M

Yes?

O

There was this girl.

M

And after the girl?

O

I remember how awkward I was when I asked her out. I remember the look on her face, the uncertainty—I remember how long I had to wait until she said yes.

M

After that? After the girl?

O

I remember our first kiss, where it was. I remember a grove of trees, a park bench.

M

What do you remember about getting here? That was after the girl. How did you get here?

O

I remember the engraving on the bench. "In memoriam. For the advancement of knowledge."

M

A bench.

O

To knowledge. Then.

M

Did the girl read books?

O

I didn't know. Not—

M

I had a lot of books once.

O

I loved her.

M

What was her name?

(A long silence.)

I remember the rockets. How sad we were. How long it took the scientists. How many faults. How many lives.

(Beat.)

We're not on Mars. Even after all this ti—has it been so long?

I remember my childhood. It's a blur. Yesterday's foggy. My childhood, a world of smoke. I remember being happy. Then. Feeling safe. I remember feelings, not things. No thing. Not this morning, even.

I don't feel safe now. You shouldn't feel safe either. I don't know why you should be so quiet now. Unless it's to get me to talk. I don't think you should act like that. I think I'm the one who's being taken advantage of. You think you can get me to talk.

O

Even the name I know isn't hers. I'm not telling the one I know.

M

You remember it.

O

I remember some of them. It's hard.

M

You'll remember. Or think you do.

O

I remember shapes in white. I could see the white even in the dark. I screamed.

(Pause.)

I'll be free if I forget.

M

Where did you hear that? Don't believe that.

I can't remember yesterday and I'm not free.

O

You're crazy. Why are you here?

M

I talk to myself. I'm not crazy. They inject me. I don't remember.

O

I'm here for something which I know. That I forget. Which I can't remember anymore.

M

It takes time.

O

I don't want to. I don't remember. I'm not certain.

M

It was the books, right? You know something.

O

I don't know anything.

M

I know some things. They take precautions.

O

They let me in here.

M

You're the first. The others—they lick their masters' hands. I still bite. I'm a wild dog.

O

I don't know anything anymore.* I never did. I'm not sane. Let me alone.

M

You do. I bet you do. You know plenty. That's why they put you in here. With me. They'll close their eyes. They let me be. Whatever I do.

O

Who? Who are they?

M

(Deflates. A pause.)

I don't know. I don't know. Shadows. Think they're above the law. I don't know.

O

You've never seen them?

M

I was a *librarian*. I used to fall down the stairs. Or miss work. Forget. Because of the gas. KGB perfume. Over long distances. Lose things. Forget names.

O

That's crazy. KGB? Secret gases? You're old.

M

Air-borne gases. Dry out the mouth, you lose your voice. For a month I couldn't make a sound. Didn't feel ill. A preacher at a rally in Washington. The same gas. The cameras were there, but he couldn't make his voice work.

O

You're crazy.

M

She had books on paper? Your girl?

(Pause.)

Once. We had five. Nothing radical. You could *feel* the type. Dents on the page.

I'd take Lewis Carroll out. Read. They monitored. Lots of license inspections and reprimands. No gas. No shadows. Then. I wasn't worth attention. Maybe they had me already.

O

She had newspapers. On paper. The stories stayed put.

M

The underground knew how. That's what I heard.

O

I don't know anything about that.

M

I can see it in your eyes. Did the coup really happen?

O

It was on the news.

M

It was erased.

O

That doesn't mean it never happened.

M

You can prove it did. On paper.

O

I never had anything on paper.

M

Then what are you in here for?

O

I don't know. I–

(He stops. Then, uncertain:)

I don't remember anything.

M

You don't remember what happens when the lights go out. You don't remember the last time you recalled, the last time you knew. You don't know how short your time is. Tell me. Tell me what you know. While you can.

O

I.

(He stops.)

I'm afraid. Of you.

M

The books. The blue sky. Your girl. You know something. What is it? You have no time. They put mango juice in the chocolate cake. My face swelled up. That's funny. Not really. What is it you know?

O

I discovered.

(Again he stops.)

M

The books. A way to read them? To get at the past? The truth about the coup?

O

A back door.

M

In the reader?

O

A way to read books without permission. Without their knowing. To copy the text. For later.

M

You did this?

O

No. No, I didn't do anything.

M

Of course you did.

O

The door's always been there. Hidden at the source.

M

You discovered it.

O

Rediscovered.

M

You read secrets. You could find who targets me? The secret smoke, the KGB perfume? The mango juice!

O

I never used it. I was scared.

M

How did you know it worked? You must have.

O

My mother used to tell me about the little men. And the big ones. Stories.

M

You read Gulliver.

O

The Federalist papers. The Constitution.

M

Internal reports on the coup. Those behind it.

O

No. Let me be.

M

They will come for you. They will cure you, you'll forget all of this. Injections. Little machines in my blood. While I am asleep. Pills. Whispered suggestions. Scalpels. Don't waste time.

O

Who are you doing this for?

M

You don't—trust me? *Me?* You're surrounded by enemies. You won't trust me? I'm here with you. They treat me special. They never would have put us together if they'd known. Never should have. You can tell me. I'll remember.

O

You're crazy. You won't. It's long. I only remember the first part.

M

You remember the whole thing.

O

How do I know it's right? Is the sky really red?

M

Orange almost.

O

The sky was blue. When the Mars rocket, in our childhoods. We never returned to Mars because of the disaster. That's what we think we know. Blue. I don't remember anything. Not anything right.

M

I'm crazy. They cure me. In the dark. I don't worry. It wears off. So far. They're getting better. They'll cure you, too. Eventually for good. Remember while you can. Tell me.

O

It wants a story. Type in it. It's a code.

M

The computer?

O

A short one. Erased. From before. The door opens. That's all.

M

Tell me the story.

O

They're listening.

M

Of course they are. People are watching us. People will know. They can't all close their ears. They can't keep the secret once they hear. Everyone listening will know. Everyone is listening.

O

I don't think I know it anymore.

M

In the dark, before. What were you doing? What were you trying to do?

O

I remember screaming.

M

And?

O

White. People in white.

M

Stopping you.

O

Keeping me from.

M

From what.

O

From.

M

From.

O

I don't—

(Stops. A realization.)

M

Remember.

O

Remember. I was trying to.

M

Like you are now.

O

And they stopped me.

M

Tried to.

O

They—

M

No, recite. Quickly—

O

Once upon a time...

M

All stories start.

O

Repeat.

(Relaxing.)

No, you're crazy.

M

No, no, quickly!

O

A veil had been rent.

M

A veil had been rent.

O

He cried in a whisper at some image,

M

(Urgent.)

Cried in a whisper. Some image.

O

some vision.

M

Some vision.

(Lights go off.)

Bedtime!

O

He cried out twice,

(Sounds of motion in the dark.)

M

He cried out. Twice.

O

a cry that was no more. Then a breath:

(Sounds of a tussle)

M

A cry—

O

The horror! The h—

*(*O *is silent.)*

M

—that was no more. Then a breath:

(A pause. M *screams, in what might be happiness—or fear. His scream abruptly ends.)*

(Darkness. End of play.)