RED SKY

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mad.pdf
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Characters

M — A large man.
O — Another man, smaller.

• A certain minimalism in the production will be appreciated.

• 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 8.)

• The characters should not be dressed in white.

• If there is a curtain call, M and O must not be on stage when the lights return after the end-of-play blackout.
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.


O: I don’t know.

M: You don’t remember being here?

O: I remember lots of things. They tell me none are true.

M: Some must be true. The most recent ones, certainly. What were you doing just now?

O: I don’t know.

M: Sure you do. Just now, before you spoke up.

O: I heard you say the sky was blue.

M: Should be blue. Was red. Orange, almost.

O: Yes.

M: But before that. Just before you were hearing me. Where were you before you were here? I didn’t see you before.

O: I don’t know.

M: You don’t remember?

O: It’s black. Blank. I just woke up.

M: You woke up, and you were here?

O: Yes.

M: But you weren’t here a moment ago. I was alone. I remember that. So you must have come from somewhere. Else.

O: Perhaps.
M: You must have.

O: I woke up, and I was here.

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

O: The sky is sometimes red. Orange, almost.

M: But 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: I must be crazy.

M: Yes, both of us. But if I think I am crazy, then I’m not. Which means the sky must be be red. On occasion.

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. The place 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 think.

M: I don’t know. I had been awake for a while. But not too long.

O: You don’t know.

M: I don’t think it was sunset. Or sunrise.

O: Bombs.

M: Perhaps.
O: Smoke.
M: Maybe.
O: Blood.
[beat.]
M: In the sky?
[beat.]
Perhaps.
[beat.]
O: I remember it being dark.
M: The sky?
O: That too. Before I heard you.
M: You said you woke up.
O: There was nothing. Then I woke up. But before the nothing.
M: Dark.
O: Dark.
M: Before.
O: Some confusion. I screamed.
M: Why?
O: I don’t know.
M: Screamed?
O: I think.
M: Happy?
O: I don’t remember.
M: Scared.
O: Perhaps.
M: There was a girl here once. Before you.
O: You were scared?
M: Happy.
O: You got on well.
M: She was taken away.
O: In the dark?
M: It was dark.
O: Did you scream?
M: I don’t remember.
O: Happy.
M: I don’t think so.
O: Scared, then.
M: Perhaps.

[Beat.]
Do you remember the rocket?
O: The rocket?
M: The Mars rocket. When it took off. Later the landing? On TV.
O: Yeah.
M: You remember.
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.

O: A bit more.

M: It was supposed to be much more.

O: Mars is red.

M: I don’t think that’s it.

O: The sky on 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. And I don’t remember a trip here. To this place. Not a long trip. Not a short trip even.

O: You wouldn’t remember.

M: I’ve never remembered a trip. 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: Yes. I remember the Mars rocket.

M: What else?

O: I remember books.

M: Paper books?

O: 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 the grove. “In memoriam. For the advancement of knowledge.”

M: Knowledge.

O: I remember how odd it was that a bench be dedicated to knowledge. How quaint. Nobody talks like that anymore. “Open ears bring tears.”

M: Did the girl read books? Was that it?

O: She had a lot of books.

M: Paper books?

O: I didn’t know. Not for a long time.

M: I had a lot of books once. Paper books. I think that’s so.

O: I loved her.

M: What was her name?

[O falls silent.]

Sorry. [Beat.] No names are best. [Beat.] Go on.

[A long silence.]

I remember the rockets, too. How sad we were when it happened. How long it took the scientists to figure out the faults. How many lives were lost. [Beat.] I don’t think we’re on Mars. Even after all this time. Has it been so long? I can’t remember.

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I don’t feel safe now. You know that. 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: I’ve never told her name to anybody. And even the name I know isn’t hers. I don’t think she ever told me her true name. But I’m not telling the one I know.

M: You remember it now.

O: I remember some of them now. If I think hard enough.

M: Think hard. You’ll remember them all. Or think you do.

O: I don’t want to remember.


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

M: Think hard and remember.

O: I’ll be free if I forget.

M: Where did you hear that? Don’t believe that.

O: Freedom.

M: I can’t remember yesterday and I’m not free. Forgetting—

O: Why are you here?

M: I’m not crazy. I talk to myself. 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. I think. Maybe not.

M: You’ll remember everything. It takes time.

O: I don’t want to remember. I don’t remember. I’m not certain of anything.
M: It was the books, right? You know too much.

O: I don’t know anything.

M: I know some things too. They take precautions with me. You’re the first they’ve let in here with me.

O: The girl.

M: Some of the others have never seen the sun. They lick their masters’ hands. I still bite. I’m a wild dog. They’re careful.

O: I don’t know anything anymore. 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. No one cares what happens in here. They let me be. Whatever I do.

O: Who? Who are they?

M: [Deflates. A pause.] I don’t know. I don’t know. Shadowy figures. Think they’re above the law. No clear goals. I don’t know.

O: You’ve never seen them?

M: They’ve got it in for me. They don’t need to be seen. They’ve got a gas, a lead-based gas. “KGB perfume” to me. Invented during the cold war. They can deliver it over very long distances. It drops you in your tracks. I was a librarian. I used to fall down the stairs. Or miss work. Forget. Because of the gas. Lose things. Forget names.

O: You’re crazy.

M: I’ve thought that. But if you think you’re crazy, you’re not, you know.

O: Who put you here with me?

M: There’s a drug which dries out the mouth so you lose your voice. It’s airborne, a gas. I realized, only after I got here, I realized that I’d been administered it years ago, at university, during a month when I couldn’t make a sound. I didn’t feel ill. A sabotage of the education process, no good explanation. On TV news, a community preacher at a rally in Washington DC. The same gas. The news cameras were there, but he couldn’t make his voice work.

She had paper books? Your girl?
O: Yes. She did.

M: I was a librarian. Once. We have five. Nothing radical. It was wonderful to run your hands over the pages. You could feel the type, indentations in the page.

I used to take our Lewis Carroll out of the exhibit and monitoring and back to my office to read at night. They didn’t like that at all. But they kept fairly square still then. License inspections and reprimands from superiors. The gassing, the shadowy people, they didn’t start until later. Didn’t pay attention to me then. Not much.

O: She had newspapers. On paper. The stories didn’t change, and you could keep them. Make copies.

M: The underground knew how to put the electronic news on paper, right? Make it permanent. That’s what I heard.

O: I don’t know anything about that.

M: I bet you do. You’re not telling.

O: I don’t remember anything.

M: It’s all coming back to you. I can see it in your eyes. Did the coup really happen?

O: The coup?

M: You know, the coup. Change in power. They orchestrated it. Used their gas.

O: It was on the news.

M: It was erased.

O: That doesn’t mean it never happened.

M: But you can prove it did.

O: No, I can’t.

M: You could. I bet you had it on paper.

O: I never had anything on paper.

M: Then what are you in here for?
O: I don’t know. [He stops.]

M: You do. You remember now.

O: [Silence.]

M: They have a device, an instrument of maiming. It shreds the cartilage of the joints without leaving a trace of anything. Not on skin, not on clothing. Did you know about that? It works from an extraordinary distance. Some kind of sound wave. What do you know about that?

O: [Uncertain.] I don’t remember anything.

M: I experience it as extreme pain, here in my hip. Now chronic. If you wear rubber you can avoid it, the joint-gun, but you can’t always. Can’t always wear rubber, I mean. And not in here. I used to, though. Rubber underclothes. Rubber underneath my hat. Around my elbows. Stuffed in my crotch. I know a violinist, a great lady. Couldn’t play as she got older. They got her in her fingers and neck. And you can’t see who did it to you, or sue them, or even accuse those you suspect. It’s top secret. It doesn’t exist for a court of law. No one’s looking for it. They say it’s natural. A disease.

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.]

M: The books. The blue sky. Your girl. You know something. What is it? You have no time. They targetted my allergy to mangos. Tropical fruit. That’s funny. Not really. They put mango juice in the chocolate cake. My face swelled up. Like a basketball, marks like poison ivy. What is it you know?

O: I discovered. [Again he stops.]

M: The books. What about the books? A way to read them? A way to get at the past? A secret from the no-record times? Something closer to home? The truth about the coup? They were beind the coup. Night work.

O: A back door.

M: What about it? What do you remember?

O: A way to read books without permission. Without monitoring. To copy the text. Save it.
M: You did this? You cracked the books?

O: No. No, I didn’t do anything.

M: Of course you did. Why are you here?

O: It’s always been like this. The door has always been there. The first coder hid it, or it was intentional. For those who never have had to ask permission.

M: You discovered this then.

O: Rediscovered.

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

O: I never used it.

M: You had the power to go where you pleased and you didn’t use it?

O: Never.

M: I don’t believe you. You’re one of them.

O: I was scared. I never did anything.

M: How did you know it worked? You must have. They made you forget.

O: I read Gulliver’s Travels.

M: What else.


M: Internal reports on the coup. The Intelligence community behind it.

O: No.

M: Don’t waste time. They will come for you. They will cure you, you’ll forget all of this. Like they cure me. Injections. Little machines in my blood. While I am asleep. Pills. Whispered suggestions. Scalpels. What’s your secret?

O: I don’t—
M: You don’t—trust me? Me? You’re surrounded by enemies. They’re all around you. Shadowy people of whose intent—who can say? A neurotic need for power to compensate for arrested emotional development. Bad self-image. No reason for what they do. You won’t trust me? A fellow? I’m here with you. They treat me special. Carefully. They never would have put us together if they’d known. Never should have. You can tell me. I’ll remember.

O: I only remember the first part.

M: You remember the whole thing.

O: And how do I know it’s right? Is the sky really red?

M: Orange almost. Sometimes.

O: How do we know that? Because it’s so?

M: The sky is blue.

O: Was blue. When the Mars rocket, in our childhoods. We never returned Mars because of the disaster. That’s what we think. From what we think we know. I don’t remember anything.

M: There was a television program. Ten years ago. Did a series of interviews, people permanently mentally damaged from some kind of gas leaked into their building while they worked at night.

O: That’s crazy.

M: They say that. And 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: An identity code. Replace your ID number with the magic one and open sesame. That’s all I’m going to say.

M: It’s not enough. What’s the number?

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. And everyone is listening. Speak.

O: I don’t remember.
M: You do. You will.

O: I don’t want to remember.

M: Think. 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. Use your time to—

O: The key. Thirty-two digits. Listen. Remember. In case I forget. You’re the only—

M: It starts.

O: 66. 33. 48. 73. Four four-number groups.

M: [Repeats.] 66. 33. 48. 73.
O: 64. 3C. 98. 69.

M: [Quickly, immediately following O.] 64. 3C. 98. 69.


[Sounds of motion in the dark.]

6B. 8B. [Sounds of a tussle.] 45. [Last number choked but clearly audible.]

67. [O is silent.]

M: [Repeating last number.] 67. [M screams, in what might be either happiness—or fear. His scream is abruptly cut off.]

[Darkness.]

[End of play.]