

A wall. Grey and crumbling, stained with hundreds year old graffiti. Distant low rumbles are heard throughout: a storm that is biding its time. The light is a mix of grey and dying red. Tomas sits. He is an old man with a long beard, dirty hands and in a faded, too small suit that is smudged with dust and mud. A large walking stick, one of those "invisible dog" leashes is propped up next to a small satchel. He is picking through a small cloth bag and retrieving sesame seeds, popping them into his mouth, cracking the husk, sucking the seed and spitting the empty husk back into the bag.

TOMAS

Time was, good ol' Yonder, time was I do say.

*Yonder, being an invisible dog, does nothing.*

TOMAS (Continued)

But that's the kicker ain't it. The walls that all tumbled down, in the dirty water and the dead polar bear feces gets in your eyes.

*He spits seed husks harshly. Angry with himself.*

TOMAS (Continued)

I remembers her just a little bit still. Feels if I looked to hard at that there memory it would fall apart like this here wall or that there city or a falderman's heart in the beat of the drumming circle.

*Pause. Punctuated by sucking seeds and spitting husks.*

TOMAS (Continued)

I do say.

*Sucking and spitting. Sucking and spitting. Distant sound of thunder and drumming. Call of an eagle and a trill, very close, of a tin pipe. Tomas straightens up and smiles, sadly.*

TOMAS (Continued)

I do say, Yonder, I do say. S'not her, but lovely woman just the same, just the same lovely woman.

*He puts the bag of seeds inside the satchel, runs dirty hands through his hair, attempting to neaten it a bit. Brushes some of the mud from his clothes.*

Moves his old body a bit straighter and taller than he might normally. Sara enters. She is a plump woman, in her mid-forties, with long auburn hair and a nearly perpetual smile. She is dressed like a peasant, but clean and neat. A large bag full of flowers and herbs is strapped to her body and she is playing a light tune on a a tin whistle. When she sees Tomas standing by the wall, trying to look nonchalant, she stops playing for a beat, takes his eagerness in and then plays once more. She walks past him.

TOMAS (Continued)

Now you just, eh ol' Yonder, now you just what the devil could poor ol' Tomas done to deserve the cold shoulder in the light of day by the lady Sara on a dusty wall with sun shiving through clouds and a storm 'pon the way? I do say.

*Sara stops playing.*

SARA

I do say that a Mister-y Tomas did, 'pon my life, nearly a yearn ago leave the lady Sara's village with nary a word to the wise nor a by-your-by in the pale moonlight and scattled his way out and about and not e'en a pale word or two on parchment left behind, just the empty curve of his head left in his pillow and a piece of time. Broken at that.

TOMAS

Aye. That. Still and all, woman, still and all.

SARA

(softly)

Still and all indeed.

*She turns, brightly, and swoops in to embrace Tomas.*

SARA (Continued)

Tomas.

TOMAS

Sara.

*After a moment, Sara lets Tomas go and pets the invisible Yonder.*

SARA

Come'un Tomas, lets you back to the village, and makes you some warm food and warmer drink. They'n'll be happy to see you I know, ceptin perhaps Michael the Blacksmith ain't too happy with you after that last card game.

TOMAS

I won it fair by the book I tell ya, no trickery needed to beat that oaf, I tell ya.

SARA

Don't I know it, still and all, he's a sensitive man and his pride was pricked.

TOMAS

Aye. Warm food and warmer drink sounds good but . . .

*Pause.*

SARA

What 'tis?

TOMAS

Sit here a spell, by an old man. I've . . . seen some things this last year. Things. Not so good things. Yonder and I seen . . .

SARA

Sounds like you need that drink for the bare telling of your tale.

TOMAS

Close too. Close too. Aye, I've missed you my bonny Sara. You did know me better'n any else since-

*Pause.*

SARA

Her.

TOMAS

I do say.

SARA

So we sit a spell.

*She hoists herself upon the wall, reaches into her sack. Pulls out a small, earthen jug.*

SARA (Continued)

An' 'tis a chance-currance I just happen to have a bit of the bite of Channie's best brew for to warm your lips and tongue with a sharper poison than mine own kisses.

TOMAS

Sara, Sara. A blessing you are on the life of me.

*He swigs a small bit of the alcohol - it is potent and burns. He coughs.*

*Hands the brew back to Sara who swigs as well and does not cough.*

TOMAS (Continued)

Channie's been brewing strong again.

SARA

Aye. Seems stronger'n stronger each batch. We gets used to it.

*She hands it back to Tomas. He swigs - well, sips a bit more of the drink. Gets his bag of sesame seeds and begins cracking, sucking and spitting the husks.*

TOMAS

Somethin' is a-comin' Sara. Somethin' bad. I . . . don't know if I can e'en explanation it right.

*Long pause.*

SARA

Best tell it soft and fast and no mind to right or wrong. We can figure right and wrong after and together.

TOMAS

Soft and fast. E'en thinking of the words brings the taste of blood 'pon me, but soft and fast I'll endeavor.

*He sips more alcohol.*

TOMAS (Continued)

'Twas just a touch lessen a year 'go I went out, small ball of rice, some dried peaches, a pinch or two of black tea, one bite of cheese from Katrina's goat, three matches, two spoons, a sharp-ly blade I'd won from my card game, two clean pair of socks, some o' your willow bark and chamomile cures, five old coins from the per-fall, scarf 'n' gloves knit by the widow Portia, and the half book you gifted me my birthday considerin' I might, just might find me the other half along my travels.

*Pause.*

TOMAS (Continued)

An' her picture o' course.

*Sara takes the jar from Tomas and drinks.*

SARA

Just a good bye woulda been nice.

TOMAS

Aye, and o' course your right and I regrets any pain-

SARA

By-the-bygones now. Go on with your tale afore the night steals too far up the day.

TOMAS

Aye. Yonder and me, headed first east, toward the village Fondloo but then met a small man with a great big pig and ended up swapping stories and card tricks for the better part of a week till . . . but no, it'd take a year to tell the year I had and I don't think we have the time Sara. Sara. It's a bad darkness that I seen. No, I know. Soft and fast. Twas 'bout 500 leagues hence, north-west o' here I first saw it.

*Pause.*

TOMAS (Continued)

A blackness like how ink spreads on parchment. The clouds were oily, smelling of the devil's own piss. By the time I reached the village, it had moved over the land enough away that the sun was shinin' once more but the village, the land that had been under that storm, oh Sara.

*Pause.*

TOMAS (Continued)

Everything had rotted. Like from the inside out, buildings were hollow, crumbling. The barest breeze settin' them to creak and tumble. People . . . children. Clawin' at each other, babies liquifyin' even as they were wrapped around the festering meat of their mothers. The smell of fresh pigs guts after a slaughter, you know that ripe, metallic smell that is part blood and part torn muscle and part feces . . . smells like heaven compared to the smell after this storm . . . this thing that come upon that place. That place an other places too, Sara. It disappear after it envelopes a place, wisps away to barely seen, ghost of a blackness, just a smudge in the sky, a floating nothing in your eyes that you think is dust or grit or a memory. First I thought it'd gone forever, but then I came 'cross another place that was. I don't know. *Eaten* by this storm. This thing.

*He stops. Sara takes his hand.*

TOMAS (Continued)

Sara, this thing. It's. Take the worst taste you ever held in your mouth and the smell of an open latrine on the hottest summer day and the thinnest, sharpest razor-grass cut, mix 'em all together and you'll not have a clue as to what I'm 'membering. And I tried, tried tellin' people. Followed it so good got to be I could tell where it would form, where it would swallow like a huge maggot, black with death and rot and I'd tell 'em, warn 'em, try to make 'em leave, make 'em

(MORE)

TOMAS (Continued)

know. Make them save the fewkin' children Sara, it was the children that got me most, the blind selfishness of them folk not taking into account their very own, their kin, their duty. Leavin' it all to the . . . Lord and mercy Sara, they wouldn't listen. Thought I's an old, crazy man beggin' fer attention. They couldn't see it till too late, couldn't feel it till 'twas in their skin, couldn't fewkin' have the imagination to consider, just consider the sky might turn traitor, might suck up all the bad and all the evil and spew it back at us like the vomit of some insane god, Sara, couldn't be bothered to plan for a thing they didn't understand, didn't want to see, didn't want to fewkin' recognize as a real and true thing.

*Pause.*

TOMAS (Continued)

Shouldn't be real, I reckon and grant. Shouldn't be a thing outside a tale told by firelight to the younguns to get their blood a pumpin' and hearts a flutter. But 'tis at thing. A real thing out there, spun from knows not what, but real as death an' twice as brutal. Seen animals crawlin' with them guts liquidatin', people's teeth clamped round other people's necks. Heard, distant and far, screams of madness as the blackness poured down and flooded flesh. One village the . . . the people was all spread out like a giant floor of flesh and guts like they was stamped down by some huge pestle and smeared over the whole of the ground. Duck liver spread on bread. Jam on a biscuit.

*His laugh is closer to the desperate bark of a frightened dog.*

TOMAS (Continued)

No, don't have a fewkin' clue to what it is to what it comes from to what it might be fought by. Each place it destroys different. Some with fire, some acid, some melting rot, some madness, some pestilence. Some it burrows millions of insects into the bodies of the people that then explode with the sharp whine of insect wings and blue-green wings liftin' into the sky, leavin' behind bodies weepin' from a million tiny holes, weepin' blood and pus and a black tar like at the bottom of old man Taelor's 'bacco bucket.

*Long pause.*

TOMAS (Continued)

I'm so tired. Seen. Aimed to help and ain't able to do a thing as the people keeps on keeping on with the same old same old. A crazy old man. Crazy. Maybe.

*Silence. Broken by thunder and distant coyotes.*

*Nearby, a group of children sing a nursery song, too far to understand the words, but near enough to hear the melody. Something like "Greensleeves" and "London Bridge is Falling Down" combined.*

TOMAS (Continued)

Them children. All them children. The songs . . .

SARA

Hush now. Hush.

*She takes him into her arms, tightly embracing him. They sit there, on the wall, for a long while as the children's song goes round and round. Thunder.*

SARA (Continued)

The tellin's told. So now, supper. Then rest, then speakin' to the council. You're a 'spected man 'round here Tomas. 'Spected and 'mired. They'll listen.

TOMAS

I don't know anymore. Maybe they won't.

SARA

Oh, they'll be listenin' or I'll be a'fussin' and a'ruckusin' loud enough to blow all the houses down soes we have to leave and build anew.

TOMAS

So . . . you believe me. Believe it's a'comin'?

SARA

I don't have to believe. I trust you. Trust's better 'an belief.

*They gather up Tomas's belongings, take the leash and walk offstage, heading to the village.*

*Black out.*

*A fierce wind rises. Children crying. Thunder shakes the building, rattles the world. In the darkness, shapes appear. Sickly, glowing wormlike shapes that devour space and time. Eat into the earth and all those upon it. Sounds of bones breaking, flesh splitting, screams that turn to sobs. Manic laughter. The sky crashing and the pale smacking sounds of sharp teeth eating into all that is known, all that is human. A dark dance of the unknown.*

*This goes on for several minutes. There is nothing, at this point, that can be done to save anyone.*

*The smell of putrefaction.*

*Gradually, the monsters fade, the darkness decongeals. Silence falls.*

*In a pale, greenish-grey light, Tomas and Sara walk over a desecrated earth. She holds an infant in her arms. Tomas leans heavily upon a staff and moves very slowly. The wall is still intact, but the ground around it has rotted to a black ichor. They rest upon the wall. They do not speak, but take each other's hand and squeeze. Then they move on.*

*Black out.*