

Going Out

by

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Where

A bar that has seen better days. The light is dim and amber, perhaps even a bit drunk.

When

Soon.

Who

Karin is an alien. Her manner should be slightly non-human, ethereal yet grounded in tragedy and loss. She sells willing humans into seven years of bondage in order for them to have the chance at space travel.

Jeremiah is a writer approaching 40 who is being offered a dream.

Mark is Jeremiah's boyfriend. In other words, he is the collateral damage of Jeremiah's dreams.

All three sit at separate tables arranged in a triangle with Jeremiah downstage left, Mark downstage right and Karin upstage center. The light pools around each of them, leaving spaces of darkness between. When they are directly addressing each other, it is as if the person they are addressing is sitting right next to them. Karin is drinking water. Mark is drinking beer. Jeremiah is drinking single-malt scotch.

KARIN

I fell, for a very long time. Our wings only last until the end of our puberty cycle and then we fall. That was a very long time ago, that falling. That day when the world flipped over and gravity won. Still sometimes I awaken with the taste of fast, flying air in my mouth and the muscles in my back straining to move phantom wings. Waking to find myself ground-bound, held tight where once I played in the air, curved through space like a poem. When I awoke, that day after the falling, my wings were folded at the end of my bed waiting for the ceremony that passes children to adults. I could not believe they were mine, so forlorn, so fragile they were, the membrane already beginning to crack and dry, going brittle like an old one's bones. These were not me, these drying, flaking wings were not of me. I was strong and flew high and fast and danced in the air better than any of my friends. But they, those things, broken wings were mine. I remember crying. No. Not crying, gulping out great sobs but there were no tears. I felt old and young, lost and strangely centered.

(MORE)

KARIN (Continued)

Inevitability choked me and held me close, almost tenderly, in its arms. I was no longer a child. I no longer could fly.

MARK

There. No, there. That night. Don't you remember? In the dark broken by the glare of a streetlight through the blinds. A streetlight that would flicker on and off for a full year while we struggled, hoped, laughed and cried. There. No, there. That night. When you said I would be a good father. I-

Pause

MARK (Continued)

No. Yes. Promise, do you promise? What's a promise anyway? A lie inverted. No, that's . . . just cynical. I'm not. You said. Touching me, licking chocolate sauce from my body, the movement sudden and hot of your cock on my thigh in the middle of the night so long ago on a night when I barely knew you yet you wanted me, wanted me whole and in parts. You say you want to go to the stars, you want to go to other worlds. Oh baby, you've been other worlds away for so long now I don't remember the taste of myself on your lips or the brightness of your eyes as they ate me up in eagerness and desire, licking me in hunger. There. No, there. That night. Under a honey smooth sky, hot summer.

Pause

MARK (Continued)

Folding me inside you like a flower held in a child's hand, tight and sticky but so very necessary. Folding me inside you like an origami unicorn. Folding me inside you like sunlight caught in a jar and let out only at night. Folding me inside you like a promise of the future. Or the promise of a future. There. No, there. That night. That night. That night.

Silence.

JEREMIAH

I used to lie in the top bunk of the bunk bed I shared with my brother. Two years younger than me. I would lie there, listening to him sleep and I would imagine, pretend, fantasize that this was the night. That this was the night I would be stolen from my life, stolen from my world and shown the universe. That aliens would recognize my desire and will; my fortitude in the face of losing everything I ever knew and pick me. Fold me up in their spaceship and take me away flying out past my house my state my country my world. Flying straight up into the night and the stars and I would visit the Horsehead and Crab Nebulae, and I would explore worlds where the oceans spilled purple and the suns glowed green and the gravity made me as strong as ten men.

(MORE)

JEREMIAH (Continued)

I planned it all, saw it all, even my sadness and the fact that I would miss my family. I knew I would, but I would miss them the way that all proper heroes miss their homes: with genuine love and affection and no need to return . . . Or at least no need for many many many years. I know my parents and my brother would miss me, but I, let's face it, didn't care. Or, rather, I cared, just not enough to stop me from going with the aliens, from seeing all those strange and wonderful sites. My sadness was measured out in my fantasies and I would inspect it—all of nine or ten or so—and scrutinize it and, in the end, I knew that it was bearable. That it would always be bearable when given the chance of going out there, of seeing out there. And I would shut my eyes, squeeze them tight and hold my breath and wait, my mind repeating, like a mantra, "take me take me take me take me." And no one came. No spaceships, no aliens. Until now.

KARIN

My silven, what you would call "grandmother," dismissed my parents after the ceremony that saw my wings burned and scattered to the winds. She sat in my old room while I gathered the few possessions I was allowed to bring to the Women's House. She knew I did not want to leave my room, my wings and my freedom behind but she said nothing. No gentle reproach about leaving childish things behind, no patronizing but well-meaning platitudes about being a woman. She sat. Her eyes bright, her hands curled into continual fists, her breath slightly labored and wheezing. I had seen holos of her when she was young, of her flying and she was beautiful then. Even in old, stuttering holos I could see she was a better flyer than I ever had been, with a form and grace that made you stop breathing. I remember, when I was seven and had seen those images for the first time I had cried and cried for the loss of her wings so long ago. For the loss of her sheer and overwhelming beauty, dragged down by the years and the capitulation to gravity. She had stroked my head, crooned an old lullaby and simply said "wings are for the young, shush now. Shush." Then, the day I lost my wings, she sat, hands twisted together in her lap, rocking front to back ever so slightly. She said nothing, sang nothing as I packed. Her eyes just drank me in, as if she were somehow watching over my whole sorrow. Providing witness to my loss with no expectations, no judgments. It was the kindest moment anyone has ever given me. Years later I would visit her as she lay dying, having outlived my father and mother. She had shrunk down to an impossibly small woman whose body, dry as a desert, was a constant source of pain. Her eyes, dulled by the drugs and the pain and the years, were still brighter than most people's and always seemed to twinkle as if she were somehow fueled by starshine. I sat next to her for three days as she died, telling her stories she had told me as a child. Spinning lies about my life.

(MORE)

KARIN (Continued)

Sometimes simply humming tunes that came into my head. Holding her gnarled hands and stroking her rough cheek. Several hours before she died she whispered to me, "I miss the air."

MARK

You are part of me. When you are part of someone how can you leave them?

KARIN

Sometimes the parts of you that you most love are lost. That does not mean you are less a person.

JEREMIAH

Whose dreams do you follow? Is there a taxonomy of dreams, a hierarchy? Do the dreams of love and family trump those of personal freedom and exploration. Do dreams of flight mean more than dreams of embrace?

KARIN

And just then, I knew that she had lied to me all those years ago, that she had never really believed that wings are only for the young.

MARK

There, that night. Then. A moment spent between the starlight, between the silences. You and I had there, shared that. Now, charred, like a falling star turned to a hunk of rock. Black. Burned.

JEREMIAH:

Sometimes I forgot my fantasy, forgot to wish for them to take me away and found myself here, in a world that was sometimes barren, sometimes quite wonderful. His eyes found me in ways I never had found myself.

MARK

His eyes . . .

KARIN

Her eyes . . .

Silence.

JEREMIAH

I would, as I child, fantasize about my parent's death, my brother's death, my own death, my disappearance into the sky, finding my true parents, running away to a life of adventure and thrills, joining a circus, gaining mutant superpowers. I would, as an adult, turn much of that fantasy into stories, words strung together into narratives of loss and desire.

(MORE)

JEREMIAH (Continued)

I would use those words to seduce myself, to seduce others into believing I was, really and truly, here. Something, somethings just didn't ever seem to connect in me. I found myself orbiting friends and lovers as a way to keep myself from shooting off into the depths of my own mind, my own psychic space since that was the only space I would ever be able to reach. So, yes, I wanted out and wanted in at always the same time. Orbiting is a strange thing, a kind of controlled and perpetual falling. Falling deferred.

Pause.

JEREMIAH (Continued)

It was, in a sense, a lie. But a lie that was built on honesty and truth. Those are the trickiest ones. It was the way he clapped his hands when watching a show he loved. It was the way he tasted chocolate. It was the way he loved the taste of himself on my fingers. On my lips. It was the way he watched, wounded eyes and a terrible certainty. It was the way he moved, like space was his plaything and distance only incidental. It was the way he held his cigarette in his left hand while stirring sugar into black coffee with his right. It was the way his skin, so pale, so very pale, held the more pale moonlight. It was the gravity of his eyes. Always his eyes, holding me spinning me bringing me down to earth even as I strained to fly to wander the night between the stars.

Silence.

JEREMIAH (Continued)

Now, looking back on it I guess I would have to admit that, I never really saw him, not fully. Like he was part of a larger pattern. A pattern that always lay just out of sight. Part of a larger, never real always denied desire for . . . Well. I'm not sure. None of this is the truth and none of it is a lie. It's all, just . . . Partial. The words, the emotions, the promises. Even the lies. Partial. Still. I should have looked closer. Seen him better.

KARIN

Space travel sickens me. Literally. There are a few of each species, usually less than one in a million, whose bodies react violently against the transgression of space/time. On my first journey out I nearly died.

MARK

His bruises fascinated me, the colors shifting black purple green yellow. I was never quite sure what to say when he slept over at my house and I saw those shapes, echoes of violence on his body as he changed into his pajamas. He never tried to hide them, but never talked about them either.

(MORE)

MARK (Continued)

I wanted to ask "do they still hurt," "what did you do," "how often does he hit you," "what are his eyes like?" I would lay in bed, listening to his breath as he slept in a sleeping bag on the floor, imagining what it would feel like if my own father had come at me with fists and anger, pounding my flesh, breaking me. I was jealous of him. Not for the bruises, no. Not for the violence, but for the knowledge he must have carried inside like a small and un-crackable nut. A knowledge that he could survive pain. Survive betrayal. Survive the light of his eyes turning black and breaking his body into bits and pieces. I . . . Don't think I could have. I remember thinking "I would die." Wondering if he ever thought that. But he didn't. Die I mean. Went on to a scholarship at Emerson, met a girl, got married. Has a child right now. A little girl. Three. Maybe four. Her name is Emily. I still don't quite believe I can survive what is happening to me, I mean sure. Survive today and survive tomorrow, but the accumulation, the world as it spills over me like some dark and hooded bird filling the sky. My faith in myself is . . . tenuous. Those bruises were like a map. A map to his soul. You could see, from his body, his pale skin broken and mottled, you could see a direction, the shape of who he was and might have been. Of course it means none of that, it's just a shitty thing in the world when your father beats you.

Pause

MARK (Continued)

I was jealous of the fearlessness I saw in his eyes because it was earned, justified and I have spent so long afraid, waiting for the blow to come and fully expecting myself to shatter that I have filled myself with imagined bruises. Those don't seem to heal very well. You know?

KARIN

So I sell star travel to the people of first contact planets. Denied the sky and the stars, I surround myself with reflections of myself. Shadows of my desire. And I love them each and all. Love them dearly for their blind and eager desire to leave the gravity well of their planet, to leave all they know and love and soar higher than anyone in their history could ever believe. And I hate them each and all. Hate them with a bitter bile taste in my throat because they will fly farther than I ever will. No. Yes, I can leave this planet. But only if thoroughly frozen in hyper-hibernation. I will never see the stars in motion, or the spaces between them. I can only travel, only fly as a piece of baggage. Something of that love and hate makes me very good at my job and I have sold more travel packages than all my colleagues combined. I do take pride in my job, in the lives I have touched. In truth? It is a hollow pride at best.

JEREMIAH

Terms of the contract: All possessions currently owned by the applicant will be turned over to Star Ways Inc. Star Ways Inc. Bears no responsibility for the applicant's death, dismemberment, injury, slavery, mutation, or any other form of bodily, mental, emotional or spiritual disruption caused by any species, hostile, friendly or otherwise, that the applicant might encounter.

Silence.

JEREMIAH (Continued)

They ask . . . You basically sign up for an apprenticeship.

MARK

Slavery. Agreed upon slavery.

JEREMIAH

Learning a skill that will serve you in the . . . Out there. Can't just give us a free berth on a starship and say go get 'em tiger.

MARK

Self-delusion.

JEREMIAH

So yes, you agree for seven years to-

MARK

How fucking biblical.

JEREMIAH

I'll be learning basic galactic computer networking. A skill. Never had a skill before. I mean, none that could be paid for I mean sold. Bought. A trade, I mean. I guess I mean I haven't had a trade before. Sure I had some skill in writing. But it's not the same. A way to see the universe. To see the things I've read about since I was seven years old. Thirty years of imagining. Thirty years of fantasy. Made real.

MARK

So, question. In point of fact, will you love it? Made real?

JEREMIAH

Going out. There. A dream come true.

MARK

The dream/true transition tends to . . . Fuck things up. Sometimes. Don't you think?

Pause

MARK

Stay.

Silence.

JEREMIAH

Terms of the contract: For a period not to exceed seven of the applicant's world's years, he/she/it is to bond themselves to a Mastercrafter. Bonding permits no option to leave or disobey the Master's word.

MARK

Stay.

KARIN

Please read the contract over carefully and thoroughly Mr. Travis.

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah.

KARIN

Jeremiah. This is a very serious commitment you are making. I won't lie. Star Ways Inc. vets all our Mastercrafters and you certainly won't be a "slave."

MARK

Stay. The night. No, not then. There.

KARIN

However, you will be ceding significant personal rights for the period of your bondage.

JEREMIAH

But then I will be free to see it all?

KARIN

Free to see as much as you can find ways to afford, Mr. Travis.

MARK

Jeremiah.

KARIN:

Jeremiah. You will need to sign here, here. Initial there. Sign here, here and here.

JEREMIAH:

It's not that they came with brochures showing worlds and peoples so beautiful and alien that you want to cry. It's not that, when you are meeting with one of the reps and you look in their eyes and you see that they are not human, you realize for real and deep down in your gut that we are not alone.

(MORE)

JEREMIAH: (Continued)

It's not that it will be the adventure of a lifetime or that you are a science fiction fan or even that you have dreamed about this since you were a child looking up at the stars on a dark summer night while perched on your father's shoulders as the Persiad meteor shower broke the sky with streaks of light and you wanted so badly to fly up there. It's that, in the middle of the night, after he has fallen asleep next to you and you turn on your side to look at the streetlight shining in to carve a pale, yellow scar on his cheek and you can still taste him on your lips and you know that he loves you and you know that you love him and his eyes have held you safe for almost five years now but still you look deep into yourself, past the fears and past the love and past the lies and even past the truth and you find that, quite simply, you belong somewhere else. Somewhere out there. And so you lie on your back, staring through the ceiling and out into space and you try to find the words and a part of you wishes he never ever wakes up so that you don't have to . . .

KARIN:

In dreams I still fly. I wake up, nauseous and chilled by the transition from dream to waking life. Actual life. Every day I ask myself, if I could, would I let those dreams go. Forget the pain of waking up to find that my wings are still and truly gone? To forget what has been lost. To be clean and blank and free of a past that still hurts. I don't know. To have no dreams or dreams that remind you only of loss and regret. I don't know.

Black out.