

A. Lee

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PAM KINGSLEY

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PLACE: Charleston, S.C.

TIME: 1849

CHARACTERS

A. LEE - Transvestite male in their late 30's

THE AUDIENCE is the other "character" in the play

THE SETTING

A room with a chair, a vanity or small make-up table and stool, a wardrobe dressing screen and a divan.

(AT RISE: A.LEE is behind the three-panel wardrobe screen, wrestling with what to wear. They suddenly attend to someone speaking to them. A.LEE speaks from behind the screen.)

A.LEE

(calling)

Oh! (pause) I didn't expect you this early. Come in. Please sit. Anywhere.

(A. LEE tosses a chemise and a couple other items of clothing provocatively over and on top of the screen as if trying to figure out what to wear.)

I don't know why, but I'm having a hard time deciding. Normally, I'd pick the aquamarine charmeuse, but for some reason that seems too intimate right now. (beat) Which sounds rather gauche when I say it aloud. (beat) I mean, silk is much more negotiable than, say, a velvet. Am I right? You can spread out on a divan in a silk and still cover the necessary bits in waves and folds. Velvet is unforgiving. It reveals everything. You can only spread so far in velvet before things get awkward.

I am going to be rude, now, and ask. I don't believe we have any *friends* in common, so, then, why are you here?

(There is a pause after which A. LEE comes out from behind the screen. They are slim and rather fragile looking, wearing a kimono. Their hair is hidden under a thin netting wound in a fashion to support a wig.)

A. Lee in partial make-up. It is clear they are older yet still quite beautiful.)

What? No. I did not know. When did he...

(A. LEE is interrupted.)

I see. *(Pause)* This is...this is unfortunate news. Was it opium? Oh. It was Spirits. Well. We expected it to catch up with him. You can't drink yourself into a stupor day unto night without losing that battle.

(Smiles ruefully.)

May I ask how you found me? *(pause)* Truly? I thought he'd forgotten. Intentionally.

Intentionally forgotten. It has been a while since we, hmmm ...*disentangled* in a rather sad and spectacular way.

Two surprises.

(A. LEE gets lost in thought.)

What? Oh, well—you've brought me two surprises. Eddie is dead and he thought of me before he died. I could not have conjured two more unimaginable circumstances.

You brought me an...what's in it?

(A. LEE goes to the little make-up table and picks up an envelope.)

A poem? From Eddie?

(A. LEE turns the envelope over in their hands and then presses it between both palms as if getting warmth from the contact.)

I think I will wait for a more private moment to investigate the contents.

(A. LEE tosses the envelope back down and listens, then sits at the make-up table and starts finishing their make-up.)

Yes, well, I assumed that since you are here, now, you would know exactly what our relationship was. It is an obscure facet of a rather public life Eddie entrusted with very few. I would guess there are less than a handful of *living* souls who know.

(A. LEE continues with the make-up, glancing up at their guest once or twice.)

We were very...*special* friends for several years. Richmond? *(A. LEE laughs)* No. We met at sea—on the brig *Waltham*. I was a Carolina boy assigned to the ship's mess and Eddie's army regiment boarded in Boston headed to a posting in Charleston. We accidentally met on the deck one midnight. And found we had much in common.

Eddie and I were so young. I was only sixteen! We were both dreadful insomniacs. *(pause)* Ahhhh, but we were romantics.

(A. LEE is lost in memory as they speak.)

I would pinch flagons of liquor stashed in the officer's hold and Eddie would spin me fantastical stories under the stars. He began weaving tales of a mysterious Turk—a warlord who fell in love with a peasant. Each night I lay in his arms; I was his Ada, his peasant of desire and he, my Tamerlane. We traveled the Turkish Empire and made love under a canopy of diamonds flung across the indigo sky.

I lived with no other thought than to love and be loved by him.

(A. LEE relinquishes their reverie for rue.)

The *Waltham* docked at Charleston. Eddie headed to Fort Moultrie, and I headed to town, where I would wait days, sometimes weeks, for our moments together. *(pause)* Those trysts ended after a couple of years when Eddie left Charleston for more military nonsense up north.

(A. LEE laughs ruefully.)

Promises slipped from his lips in dribbles of liquor. We were bound together forever, he told me. I was eternal love. He would "send for me" once he became established.

The ticket never came.

(A. LEE shakes off their resentment like a speck of lint but with enough sorrow behind their eyes to belie the bravado.)

What's a girl to do?

(A. LEE has finished their make-up and rises. They slip open the kimono. Underneath is a silk slip. A. LEE pointedly becomes subtly yet effectively seductive.)

I embraced my nature and became an Antebellum delicacy available only to those with the most discerning tastes and the deepest pockets. I stopped being Adam and became Annabel. Eddie played with big guns up north and big guns partied with me here in Charleston. I was quite the toast of curtained Carolina—a fringe fantasy for southern gents who were easily bored with finding ways to spend their money and their amusement.

(A. LEE goes behind the screen and slips into a chemise.)

Yes, of course. We ran into each other again. It was long after his marriage. Marriage. Poor girl. Hardly out of napkins and the figure of a boy *(a rueful laugh)*—well, what would you expect? Locked into union with a neurotic drunk twice her age. I suppose if you know nothing of love you have nothing with which to compare it.

(A. LEE comes out from behind the screen with silk stockings and sits on the divan to put them on.)

I had traveled to New York City--sent for by a Carolina "acquaintance" of mine who was planted in town for purposes of business and bored beyond belief. My evenings were full; however, my days were free, and I amused myself by wandering around the city.

It was in Fordham near St. James College. I nearly passed by him on the street, so ravaged was his appearance. Eddie didn't recognize me at first. His rheumy eyes kept searching my face like a lighthouse with a failing lamp—flickering across and back again.

"Adam?" he asked, finally. Collapsing into my arms he cried, "Ada. My Ada."

In that one moment, my heart would have broken had it ever been sufficiently healed.

"I am Annabel now, Edgar," I whispered.

We spent the afternoon in each other's arms one last time. That was two years ago, now. I did not realize he was so very ill.

(Stockings on, A. LEE rises and slips into shoes. They cross to the make-up table and pick up the envelope again.)

Thank you for bringing me Eddie's letter. I am afraid I must ask you to leave now, however. I have a...an appointment. I must finish getting ready.

(A. LEE watches the visitor go, then collapses back down on the divan, clutching the envelope to their heart. A. LEE opens the letter and stares transfixed, then reads aloud. LIGHTS begin slow fade to BLACKOUT during the second stanza.)

//It was many and many a year ago,
 In a kingdom by the sea,
 That a maiden there lived whom you may know
 By the name of Annabel Lee;
 And this maiden she lived with no other thought
 Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,
 In this kingdom by the sea:
 But we loved with a love that was more than love—
 I and my Annabel Lee;
 With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
 Coveted her and me.//

(BLACKOUT.)

- END -