

Blackout

By

PERUSAL COPY
LEE LAWING

Cast of Characters

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| ETHEL Chelsvig | 19, female, white, a sailor's wife |
| GEORGE Woodley | 30s, male, white, a longshoreman |
| SCOTT Lawrence | 30s, male, white, the bartender |
| KYOKO Lawrence | 30s, female, Japanese, Scott's wife |

Seattle's first blackout after the Pearl Harbor attacks. Ethel Chelsvig was the ringleader married to a boiler technician on the USS Destroyer *Kane*. George Woodley was a longshoreman who also participated in the riot.

Scott and Kyoko are my own creation.

Italics are Ethel's own words.

SET: Bare stage representing a bar in Seattle.

PLACE: Seattle, WA.

TIME: 10:50 PM, minutes before the blackout that is occurring at 11:00 PM, December 8, 1941.

SETTING: Bare stage, representative of a bar.

AT RISE: In the darkness we hear a radio announcement of FDR declaring war on Japan from December 8, 1941. As the lights come up, we see a bar that can only be a few barstools that are in front of it. SCOTT is behind the bar polishing a glass as ETHEL enters. She enters a little sheepishly. She carries a purse.

SCOTT

Hello. Welcome.

ETHEL

Ah. Thank you.

(ETHEL walks a little hesitantly up to the bar, sitting on a barstool and placing her purse on the bar.)

ETHEL

May I have a Rainier? Please?

SCOTT

I'll need to see your ID.

ETHEL

I hope I brought it.

SCOTT

I hope so too.

(ETHEL grabs the purse and opens it and starts looking through it, but then she closes it in defeat.)

ETHEL

I'm 19. My husband is on the *Kane* tonight, so I'm alone at the house. I was just too scared to stay at home after what happened in Pearl Harbor last night. We could be next.

SCOTT

I can understand the fear. It's shaken us all up that's for sure.

ETHEL

I know. At least we are implementing the blackout tonight.

SCOTT

Does that make you feel safer?

ETHEL

It helps ease some of the anxiety. We won't just be sitting ducks like they were in Hawaii.

SCOTT

It should give most of us some sense of calm.

ETHEL

Wouldn't that be nice? A sense of calm. After President Roosevelt's speech this morning, I can't imagine that we could hope for any sense of calm for some time.

SCOTT

Maybe it will be over fairly soon.

ETHEL

I pray for that. For my husband's sake. And all the men serving.

SCOTT

You said you wanted a Rainier?

ETHEL

Yes. And thank you. For letting me stay.

(SCOTT opens a beer for her and hands it to her and she gets a coin out of her purse.)

SCOTT

You're a sailor's wife. I give discounts for you.

ETHEL

Raymond is just a boiler technician.

SCOTT

He's still serving and risking his life. I spent most of my navy days in similar conditions before I was discharged and moved here.

ETHEL

You should keep the money. Who knows what will happen to us all in the next few years? Jobs are already hard to come by. I can't imagine it will get much better if we're involved in a war.

SCOTT

Like you said, money will be hard to come by. Consider this a gift from me and my wife.

ETHEL

That's very kind of you.

(ETHEL puts the coin back into her purse.)

ETHEL (continued)

How long have you run the bar?

SCOTT

Ten years. My wife and I. She is a great cook. I can have her cook something up for you if you're hungry. Hamburger?

ETHEL

The beer is fine for now. Thank you though.

SCOTT

She makes the best apple pie in Seattle.

ETHEL

Maybe some later, because how could I pass up that kind of praise, but it doesn't sound all that appetizing with the Rainier. Do you have any peanuts?

SCOTT

I do. I'll need to grab some from the back.

ETHEL

Thank you.

(SCOTT exits behind the bar and soon after GEORGE enters. He is visibly drunk and has been drinking his way through a few bars before hitting this one. ETHEL downs her drink.)

ETHEL

Hello.

GEORGE

Hi there.

ETHEL

The bartender will be back shortly. He went to get some peanuts.

GEORGE

You can never have too many of them.

(SCOTT enters carrying a bowl of unshelled peanuts.)

SCOTT

Welcome. What can I get you?

GEORGE

What are you having?

ETHEL

A Rainier.

GEORGE

Who can drink that swill? Give me a Budweiser.

(SCOTT opens up the beer for GEORGE and hands it to him. GEORGE fumbles for change in his pants pocket and gives it to SCOTT.)

SCOTT

I happen to like the swill.

ETHEL

Are you ducking in here to wait out the blackout?

GEORGE

What blackout?

ETHEL

The one the city is implementing tonight.

GEORGE

Oh damn. I forgot all about that. No one else was talking about it at the other bars I've been to. Lucky I made it here before I couldn't see a damn thing. Looks like you're through with your beer. Can I buy you another one?

ETHEL

Sure. I'll have a Budweiser like him.

(SCOTT delivers a beer to ETHEL and GEORGE fumbles again for some change but finds he doesn't have any more and ETHEL takes out her coin from her purse and hands it to SCOTT.)

ETHEL (continued)

Looks like you're still getting my money.

GEORGE

That's very kind of you to pay.

(SCOTT pockets the coin from ETHEL.)

SCOTT

Extremely nice. Maybe I could offer you a bit of food? Might help with . . . well . . .

ETHEL

His wife is a good cook. Best apple pie in Seattle.

GEORGE

Wow, even better than my mom's?

SCOTT

I've never had your mom's so I can't say for sure.

GEORGE

Maybe later. Of course, only if you're buying.

(Here, GEORGE laughs.)

GEORGE (continued)

I'm George by the way.

ETHEL

Ethel.

SCOTT

The wife of a sailor on the *Kane* just so you have that bit of information.

GEORGE

It's a pleasure to meet you, Ethel. Wife of a sailor. Let's toast.

ETHEL

What are we toasting?

GEORGE

A successful blackout. Doesn't it scare the hell out of you thinking those rotten bastards attacked Pearl Harbor without any warning. It could be the same here.

SCOTT

Which is why we are implementing the blackout.

ETHEL

Of course.

SCOTT

We need to wait to see what happens.

ETHEL

I was so scared last night listening to the news. The radio kept coming in out of the programming and they'd be playing Benny Goodman and then it would all go silent and I swear that silence just terrified me more than any announcement.

GEORGE

You're so damn right. Silence will be the death of us all if those dirty Japs don't get to us first.

ETHEL

I can't wait to see how this plays out.

GEORGE

What do you mean?

ETHEL

Look out there. There are so many lights up and down the street. You can see them from in here they're so bright.

(GEORGE takes his beer over to look out the window.)

GEORGE

You're right. Fahey-Brockman's letters alone will light a path for the Japs to attack us.

ETHEL

What is that?

GEORGE

A clothing store for men. The one with the biggest sign.

ETHEL

Anyone with the biggest neon sign should be the first one to go black.

(An air raid siren is heard off stage. SCOTT turns out the light behind the bar.)

GEORGE

Witching hour.

ETHEL

Good. Now let's see them go dark. How hard can it be for people to turn off a light?

GEORGE

Still pretty bright out there.

SCOTT

There's bound to be some hiccups with the process.

ETHEL

Hiccups? Patriotism can't afford any hiccups. *I, for one, am a patriot.*

GEORGE

Me too. Look how bright it is out there, fellow patriot. Doesn't seem that people are doing their part to get this city to go black.

ETHEL

They said 11:00.

GEORGE

They sure did.

SCOTT

It is the first one. It seems that there will be some issues to work out.

ETHEL

This is war. One light in the city might betray us.

GEORGE

She's right.

(Another air raid siren is heard off stage. This one a little louder than the first.)

ETHEL

Surely everyone heard that.

(ETHEL walks over to where the lights are off stage and watches.)

GEORGE

Anything?

ETHEL

Nothing.

GEORGE

What time is it now?

SCOTT

Just after 11:00.

ETHEL

That's way after it should have occurred.

SCOTT

It's important for everyone to just stay calm. People are trying to make a living out there.

GEORGE

Every one of them deserve to have bombs dropped on them for not obeying the blackout.

SCOTT

Whoa, whoa

ETHEL

He's right. Look at them. None of them are going black!

GEORGE

Someone's got to do something about it.

ETHEL

You're right about that. *Are we going to stand by while these lights threaten the very life of our city?*

GEORGE

Hell no!

ETHEL

Are you with us?

SCOTT

I need to watch the bar. This is my business. I need to look after it. I've turned off my lights.

ETHEL

Oh sure. Watch the bar while your city is annihilated. There are more important things than protecting your place of business. You may not have one after tonight if those filthy Japs have their way with us.

SCOTT

Like I said, let's all just see what happens. Let's give everyone a chance to do their part.

(Another air raid siren is heard off stage and this the loudest of them all.)

ETHEL

They've had enough time for chances. I'm not waiting anymore. Let's go!! You and me.

GEORGE

Gladly!

(ETHEL and GEORGE start to exit toward the bright lights off stage.)

ETHEL

You and I need to go out there and show them what to do. *Break them! Turn them out!*

GEORGE

God bless America!!!

ETHEL

Yes. That's it. God bless America!!! Get them all to sing that as we break every light in the street. Get them singing as it will make them hungry for action. Let's turn them all into a *glass-smashing mob!*

(GEORGE exits into the bright light singing *God Bless America*. ETHEL turns around to SCOTT.)

ETHEL (continued)

You may want to reconsider not joining in for liberty, bartender. You can never be too patriotic in times like these! Sing! Sing! Sing!

(ETHEL rushes out into the light and seconds later we hear the crash of rocks hurling against the neon signs and those lights go black off stage. KYOKO enters from the kitchen. SCOTT rushes toward her with concern.)

SCOTT

What are you thinking?

KYOKO

They're gone, aren't they?

SCOTT

Yes. They're gone. I need to lock the front door.

KYOKO

You've turned out our lights?

SCOTT

Right at 11:00 as mandated.

(KYOKO walks over to the window and looks out.)

KYOKO

None of the others seem to be following the order. Everyone is so scared. Look at what they are doing to our city.

SCOTT

The police should be coming in soon. To help barricade the storefronts from the mobs.

KYOKO

We hope. If this violence is going on right now what's going to happen if this war lasts for months. Or years. I'm afraid of what might be next. We should leave this place and move as soon as possible. To Mexico or Canada. Somewhere beyond this madness.

SCOTT

Kyoko, I'm not sure if that's possible with our bar and finances.

(KYOKO reaches out and takes SCOTT's hand.)

KYOKO

Our world will never be the same if we stay, Scott.

A pause.

KYOKO (continued)

We must leave.

(KYOKO and SCOTT look out at the audience as the sound of an angry mob grows with intensity around them until BLACKOUT.)

THE END

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