One for the road

by

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INT. LOCATION

NICOLAS at his desk. He leans forward and speaks into a machine.

NICOLAS
Bring him in.

He sits back. The door opens. VICTOR walks in, slowly. His clothes are torn. He is bruised. The door closes behind him.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Hello! Good morning. How are you? Let’s not beat about the bush. Anything but that. D’accord? You’re a civilized man. So am I. Sit down.

VICTOR slowly sits. NICOLAS stands, walks over to him.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
What do you think this is? It’s my finger. And this is my little finger. This is my big finger and this is my little finger. I wave my big finger in front of your eyes. Like this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I can also use both... at the same time. Like this. I can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I’m mad? My mother did?

He laughs.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Do you think waving fingers in front of people’s eyes is silly? I can see your point. You’re a man of the highest intelligence. But would you take the same view if it was my boot – or my penis? Why am I so obsessed with eyes? Am I obsessed with eyes? Possibly. Not my eyes. Other people’s eyes. The eyes of people who are brought to me here. They’re so vulnerable. The soul shines through them. Are you a religious man? I am. Which side do you think God is on? I’m going to have a drink.

He goes to sideboard, pours whiskey.
NICOLAS (CONT'D)
You’re probably wondering where you’re wife is. She’s in another room.
(drinks)
Good-looking woman.
(drinks)
God, that was good.

He pours another.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
Don’t worry. I can hold my booze.
(drinks)
You may have noticed I’m the chatty type. You probably think I’m part of a predictable, formal, long-established pattern; i.e. I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were, in a light hearted, even carefree manner, while another waits in the wings, silent, introspective, coiled like a puma. No, no. It’s not quite like that. I run the place. God speaks through me. I’m referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, although I’m a long way from being a Jewish. Everyone respects me here. Including you, I take it? I think that is the correct stance.
(pause)
Stand up.

VICTOR stands.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
Sit down.

VICTOR sits.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
Thank you so much.
(pause)
Tell me something.
(silence)
What a good looking woman your wife is. You’re a very lucky man. Tell me... one for the road, I think...

He pours whiskey.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
You do respect me, I take it?
He stands in front of VICTOR and looks down at him. VICTOR looks up.

    NICOLAS (CONT'D)
    I would be right in assume that?

Silence.

    VICTOR
    (quietly)
    I don’t know you.

    NICOLAS
    But you respect me.

    VICTOR
    I don’t know you.

    NICOLAS
    Are you saying you don’t respect me?

Pause.

    NICOLAS (CONT'D)
    Are you saying you would respect me if you knew me better? Would you like to know me better?
    (pause)
    Would you like to know me better?

    VICTOR
    What I would like... has no bearing on the matter.

    NICOLAS
    Oh yes it has.
    (pause)
    I’ve heard so much about you. I’m terribly pleased to meet you. Well, I’m not sure that pleased is the right word. One has to be so scrupulously about language. Intrigued. I’m intrigued. Firstly because I’ve heard so much about you. Secondly, because if you don’t respect me you’re unique. Everyone else knows the voice of God speaks through me. You’re not a religious man, I take it?
    (pause)
    You don’t believe in a guiding light?
    (pause)
    (MORE)
What then?
(pause)
So... morally... you flounder in wet shit. You know... like when you’ve eaten a rancid omelette.
(pause)
I think I deserve one for the road.

He pours, drinks.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Do you drink whiskey
(pause)
I hear you have a lovely house.
Lots of books. Someone told me some of my boys kicked it around a bit. Pissed on the rugs, that sort of thing. I wish they wouldn’t do that. I do really. But you know what it’s like - they have such responsibilities - and they feel them - they are constantly present - day and night - there responsibilities - and so, sometimes, they piss on a few rugs. You understand. You’re not a fool.
(pause)
Is your son all right?

VICTOR
I don’t know.

NICOLAS
Oh, I’m sure he’s all right. What age is he... seven... or thereabouts? Big lad, I’m told. Nevertheless, silly of him to behave as he did. But is he all right?

VICTOR
I don’t know.

NICOLAS
Oh, I’m sure he’s all right. Anyway, I’ll have a word with him later and find out. He’s somewhere on the second floor, I believe.
(pause)
Well now...
(pause)
What do you say? Are we friends?
(pause)
(MORE)
I'm prepared to be frank, as a true friend should. I love death. What about you?

(pause)
What about you? Do you love death?
Not necessarily your own. Others. The death of others. Do you love the death of others, or at any rate, do you love the death of others as much as I do?

(pause)
Are you always so dull? I understand you enjoyed the cut and thrust of debate.

(pause)
Death. Death. Death. Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is. Sexual intercourse is nothing compared to it.

He drinks.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
Talking about sexual intercourse...

He laughs wildly, stops.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
Does she... fuck? Or does she... ? Or does she... like... you know... what? What does she like? I'm talking about your wife? Your wife.

(pause)
You know the old joke? Does she fuck?

(Heavily, in another voice)
Does she fuck!

He laughs.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
It’s ambiguous of course. It Could mean she fucks like a rabbits or she fucks not at all.

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
Well, we’re all God’s creatures. Even your wife.
Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
There is only one obligation. To be honest. You have no other obligation. Weigh that. In your mind. Do you know the man who runs this country? No? Well, he’s a very nice chap. He took me aside the other day, last Wednesday I think it was, he took me aside, me, and he said to me, he said, in what I can only describe as a hoarse whisper, Nic, he said, Nic (that’s my name), Nic, if you ever come across anyone whom you have good reason to believe is getting on my tits tell them one thing, tell them honesty is the best policy. The cheese was superb. Goat. One for the road.

He pours.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Your wife and I had a very nice chat but I couldn’t help noticing she didn’t look her best. She’s probably menstruating. Women do that.

(pause)

(pause)
Tell me... truly... are you beginning to love me?

(pause)
I think your wife is. Beginning. She is beginning to fall in love with me. On the brink... of doing so. The trouble is, I have rivals. Because everyone here has fallen in love with your wife. It’s her eyes have beguiled them. What’s her name? Gila... or something?

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Who would you prefer to be? You or me?

(MORE)
NICOLAS (CONT’D)
(pause)
I’d go for me if I were you. The trouble with you, although I grant your merits, is that you’re on a losing wicket, while I can’t put a foot wrong. Do you take my point? Ah God, let me confess, let me make a confession to you. I have never been more moved, in the whole of my life, as when – only the other day, last Friday, I believe – the man who runs the country announced to the country: We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you, apparently.
(pause)
I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone!

Silence.

VICTOR
Kill me.

NICOLAS
What?

VICTOR
Kill me.

NICOLAS goes to him, puts his arm around him.

NICOLAS
What’s the matter?
(pause)
What in heaven’s name is the matter?
(pause)
Mmmmmmmmm?
(pause)
You’re probably just hungry. Or thirsty. Let me tell you something. I hate despair. I find it intolerable. The stink of gets up my nose. It’s a blemish. Despair, old fruit, is a cancer. It should be castrated. Indeed I’ve often found that that works. Chop the balls off and despair goes out the window. You’re left with a happy man. Or a happy woman.
VICTOR does so.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
You’re soul shines out your eyes.

Blacketout.

Lights up.  Afternoon.

NICOLAS standing with a small boy.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
What’s your name?

NIKKY
Nicky.

NICOLAS
Really?  How odd.

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Do you like cowboys and Indians?

NIKKY
Yes.  A bit.

NICOLAS
What do you really like?

NIKKY
I like aeroplanes.

NICOLAS
Real ones or toy ones?

NIKKY
I like both kinds of ones.

NICOLAS
Do you?

(pause)
Why do you like aeroplanes?

Pause.

NIKKY
Well... because they go so fast.
Through the air.  The real ones do.

NICOLAS
And the toy ones?
NIKKY
I pretend they go as fast as the real ones do.
Pause.

NICOLAS
Do you like your mummy and daddy?
Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Do you like your mummy and daddy?

NIKKY
Yes.

NICOLAS
Why?
Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Why?
Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Do you find that question hard to answer?
Pause.

NIKKY
Where’s mummy?

NICOLAS
You don’t like your mummy an daddy?

NIKKY
Yes. I do.

NICOLAS
Why?
Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Would you like to be a soldier when you grow up?

NIKKY
I don’t mind.
NICOLAS
You don’t? You like soldiers.
Good. But you spat at my soldiers
and you kicked them. You attacked
them.

NIKKY
Were they your soldiers?

NICOLAS
They are your country’s soldiers.

NIKKY
I didn’t like those soldiers.

NICOLAS
They don’t like you either, my
darling.

**Blackout.**

**Lights up. Night.**

NICOLAS sitting. GILA standing. Her clothes are torn. She
is bruised.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
When did you meet your husband?

GILA
When I was eighteen.

Why?

NICOLAS
Why?

GILA
Why?

NICOLAS
Why?

GILA
I just met him.

Why?

NICOLAS
Why?

GILA
I didn’t plan it.

NICOLAS
Why not?
GILA
I didn’t know him.

NICOLAS
Why not?

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Why not?

GILA
I didn’t know him.

NICOLAS
Why not?

GILA
I met him.

NICOLAS
When?

GILA
When I was eighteen.

NICOLAS
Why?

GILA
He was in the room.

NICOLAS
Room?

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Room?

GILA
The same room.

NICOLAS
As what?

GILA
As I was.

NICOLAS
As I was?

Pause.
GILA
As I was.

NICOLAS
Room? What room?

GILA
A room.

NICOLAS
What room?

GILA
My father’s room.

NICOLAS
Your father? What’s your father got to do with it?

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
You father? How dare you?
Fuckpig.

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Your father was a wonderful man.
His country is proud of him. He’s dead. He was a man of honour.
He’s dead. Are you prepared to insult the memory of your father?

Pause.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Are you prepared to defame, to debase, the memory of your father?
Your father fought for his country. I knew him. I revered him.
Everyone did. He believed in God. He didn’t think, like you shitbags.
He lived. He was iron and gold. He would die, he would die, he would die for his country,
for his God. And he did die, he died, he died, he died for his God.
You turd. To spawn such a daughter. What a fate. Oh, poor,
perturbed spirit, to be haunted forever by such scum and spittle.
(MORE)
NICOLAS (CONT’D)
How do you dare speak of your father to me? I loved him, as if he were my own father.

Silence.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Where did you meet your husband?

GILA
In a street.

NICOLAS
What were you doing there?

GILA
Walking.

NICOLAS
What was he doing?

GILA
Walking.
   (pause)
I dropped something. He picked it up.

NICOLAS
What did you drop?

GILA
The evening paper.

NICOLAS
You were drunk.
   (pause)
You were drugged.
   (pause)
You had absconded from your hospital.

GILA
I was not in a hospital.

NICOLAS
Where are you now?
   (pause)
Where are you now? Do you think you are in a hospital?
   (pause)
Do you think we have nuns upstairs?

GILA
No nuns.
NICOLAS
What do we have?

GILA
Men.

NICOLAS
Have they been raping you?

She stares at him.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
How many times?
(pause)
How many times have you been raped?
(pause)
How many times?

He stands, goes to her, lifts his finger.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
This is my big finger. And this is my little finger. Look. I wave them in front of your eyes. Like this. How many times have you been raped?

GILA
I don’t know.

NICOLAS
And you consider yourself a reliable witness?

He goes to the sideboard, pours a drink, sits, drinks.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
You’re a lovely woman. Well, you were.

He leans back, drinks, sighs.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Your son is... seven. He’s a little prick. You made him so. You have taught him to be so. You had a choice. You could have encouraged him to be a good person. Instead, you encouraged him to be a little prick. You encouraged him to spit, to strike at soldiers of honor, soldiers of God.
(pause)
Oh well...

(MORE)
in one way I suppose it’s academic.
(pause)
You’re of no interest to me. I might even let you out of here, in due course. But I should think you might entertain us all a little more before you go.

Blackout.

Lights up. Night.

NICOLAS standing. VICTOR sitting. VICTOR is tidily dressed.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
How have you been? Surviving?

VICTOR
Yes.

NICOLAS
Yes?

VICTOR
Yes. Yes.

NICOLAS
Really? How?

VICTOR
Oh...

Pause.

NICOLAS
I can’t hear you.

VICTOR
It’s my mouth.

NICOLAS
Mouth?

VICTOR
Tongue.

NICOLAS
What’s the matter with it?
(pause)
What about a drink? One for the road. What do you say to a drink?

He goes to the bottle, pours two glasses, gives a glass to VICTOR.
NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Drink up. It’ll put lead in your pencil. And then we’ll find someone to take it out.

He laughs.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
We can do that you know. We can have a first glass brothel upstairs, on the sixth floor, chandeliers, the lot. They’ll suck you in and blow you out in little bubbles. All volunteers. Their daddies are in our business. Which is, I remind you, to keep the world clean for God. Get me? Drink up. Drink up. Are you refusing to drink with me?

VICTOR drinks. His head falls back.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
Cheers.

NICOLAS drinks.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
You can go.
(pause)
You can leave. We’ll meet again. I hope. I trust we will always remain friends. Go out. Enjoy life. Be good. Love your wife. She’ll be joining you in about a week by the way. If she feels up to it. Yes. I feel we’ve both benefited from our discussions.

VICTOR mutters.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
What?

VICTOR mutters.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)
What?

VICTOR

My son.
NICOLAS
Our son? Oh don’t worry about him.
He was a little prick.

VICTOR straightens and stares at NICOLAS.

Silence.

Blackout.