

BESS MONOLOGUE 2, ACT 1

From *An Increasingly Uncordial Invitation*

By Mark Chrisler

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BESS

I loved Harry. Goddamnit I did. Always knew that would be trouble. I learned at an early age that the only way not to be sad was never to be too happy. There's a deep and shadowy depression that lies in wait outside my borders. And if I open up the gates to joy and love and excitement, that dark thing forces its way through and lays waste to my spirit. It's like a Trojan horse. But no matter how smart I get, how composed and suspicious I become, that horse has a way of looking more tempting and more beautiful every morning. And so I forget. Every once in a while the opportunity looks so good, so delicious, so comforting, that I just let it through. That was Harry to me. The most gorgeous blind-side in the world. I met him and the admiration and the attraction and the understanding and the love... There's just no way to keep the consequences in mind. It was there from the get go; the longing. Not a pleasant thing. Not like in letters about unrequited desire. Not missing a person. If he was to meet me at five, and he didn't show up until seven after, those seven minutes were excruciating. Filled with paranoid ramblings in the voice of a symphony of nails scratching blackboards. Every moment without him made me wretch. And realizing how many had passed made me wretch more. Harry knew it. That bastard. He'd see me ruminating on, on anything; did he really love me, was I good enough for him, was he going to leave me, was this all a trick. And he'd smile at me from one side of his mouth; exactly the right amount of smile that said I was silly and that he loved me being silly but wished I wouldn't be. I don't care what any of you say, he was hopeful. He did give hope. He gave it to me. And children! How he loved children. His shows, it was like giving everyone the chance to be young again. He cared so much. That's not hopeful? And he thought that fooling people--not willingly like in his magic--really lying to people, even to make them happy; that was wrong. To prey on those in pain, ravage them with the teeth of false hope. That

was the true misery. That was real cynicism. He'd masked the pain--bird like, you know--just to get through those last few shows. Held himself up until the last curtain drew. True altruism. In the hospital with him, waiting for the doctors, I knew. I already knew. I watched him falling into unconsciousness, stroking his forehead and all I could think was "get out. Get out now. You stupid girl, you should have known from word one you couldn't take this, and now you've climbed too high up the ladder to get down before it collapses." It was too late, of course. Years and years by one another's sides. You can't flip it off. But I tried. I panicked and I tried. I took my hand off of his brow and let the sweat collect in his hair and weigh over his eyes. I abandoned him like a listing schooner. And when those doctors came in and they told me. My stitches broke open and my blood flowed like it was going to dissolve my blouse. So, for what? Why wouldn't I just hold him. Why did I treat his leaving like a disease I hadn't already caught? The darkness has really fallen. He's gone and the moments of my emptiness are piling upon each other as fire on a straw home. And all I can think, the only thought in my mind is, what if I'd have stayed in the night I met him? What if I'd just declined his invitation? I might not have been as happy, but I sure as hell wouldn't be so miserable.

(a pause, she listens. She is becoming more paranoid)

There's a terrible droning groan emanating from...the world, I suppose?

(she listens more)

There. Does anyone hear that?