THE TRADE

by

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FADE IN

INT.  BEDROOM – DAWN

A fan oscillates back and forth across a bed.

A thin sheet covers RAY, beer belly, hefty, 30s, and NELDA, almost as big, 30s. The fan blows hot air.

Ray stirs and swings his legs out, sitting on the edge. Nelda rolls over and puts a hand on his back.

NELDA
Leaving me?

RAY
Work won't wait.

NELDA
It's pay day, right?

RAY
I know what you're thinking.

NELDA
You'll sleep better once you get the air conditioner.

RAY
(stretching)
Fan don't do squat does it?

NELDA
(rubbing his back)
You might want me to keep you warm once we get air conditioning.

Ray shrugs, as if her touch irritates him.

RAY
It's gonna be as hot as a three-dollar iPad.

He stumbles for the bathroom. She watches, disappointment in her face.

INT.  TRUCK – DAY

Radio blares a forgotten song. Sweat rolls down Ray's cheek. Sweat stains in his armpits. Sunlight almost blinds.
EXT.  DOOLEY'S BAR - DAY

A tiny, forlorn place on a block of urban renewal. Beer truck pulls into vacant parking lot. Out of the cab, clipboard in hand, steps the dripping Ray.

INT.  DOOLEY'S BAR - CONTINUOUS

As dark as legally possible, a bar without windows. A jukebox in one corner, the standard neon and mirror advertisements.

A rectangle of sunlight silhouettes Ray as he enters.

Pauses at door. Grins because the bar is cool, almost cold. Taking a deep breath, he walks to the bar.

RAY

Dooley!

DOOLEY, 50s, an Irishman whose drinking is as plain as the nose on his face. Owner of this gone-to-hell bar. Comes running from the storeroom.

DOOLEY

I'm here!

RAY

What the hell did you do, mortgage your soul for air conditioning?

DOOLEY

Is it cooler?

RAY

Don't play with me. It's cold, and it smells like fresh mown mint on a Fall morning.

DOOLEY

You're mad. It's salt spray and green grass, like the old sod.

RAY

The old sod? I always thought your accent was fake.

DOOLEY

Don't trifle with me, lad.

RAY

Well, this is going to bring in a crowd. One extra keg or two?
DOOLEY
One and make it quick.

Ray looks down the bar to where a half-full glass of whiskey sits.

RAY
Entertaining?

DOOLEY
I'll count the bottle stock.

Dooley disappears into a back room.

Ray wanders along to the glass. Red lipstick stains the rim. He leans forward and sniffs.

KIRDRE (O.S.)
Irish.

Ray whirls and faces KIRDRE, a woman of indeterminate age, could be 30 or 50, but in truth, a woman beyond mere beauty. Everything about her seems to flicker in the light.

RAY
W...what?

KIRDRE
Irish whiskey. But then, what would you expect from Dooley?

She moves forward and holds out her hand.

KIRDRE
I'm Kirdre.

They shake, and Ray's face changes, as if he's feeling a rush of energy.

RAY
Ray.

KIRDRE
(moving past)
I know.

DOOLEY
(emerging from room)
I'll be needing the usual, plus a case of...

KIRDRE
Dooley, pour one for my friend Ray.
Dooley, none too happy, grabs a glass and a half-full bottle. Pours whiskey.

KIRDRE
And for yourself.

He pours for himself.

DOOLEY
(raising glass)
To your loveliness.

They pour down drinks, and Ray motions for a refill. Dooley refills the glasses.

RAY
To air like cool ice caves.

They drink, and Dooley refills automatically.

KIRDRE
May your sails be full, your nights long, your women soft, and your whiskey Irish.

They drain glasses and Dooley refills. They grin like sailors on shore leave, a conspiracy of three.

INT. DOOLEY'S BAR - LATER

Dooley uncaps a fresh bottle of whiskey and pours for himself and Ray. When he reaches for hers, she covers the glass with her hand.

KIRDRE
Nay, I have appointments to keep.

DOOLEY
Not yet. We've but begun.

KIRDRE
Others demand my presence.

RAY
What would it take to make you stay?

KIRDRE
You have no idea.

DOOLEY
There must be something.
KIRDRE
Aye, but are you willing to pay?

Ray pulls out his wallet and tosses it on the bar. Dooley punches open the cash register.

RAY
How much?

KIRDRE
Gentlemen, I am aware of my sweetness, my power over nature's deaf elements. I can give you August sweat on a sub-zero winter night or blue chill during a heat wave. New mown hay or the sweetest lilac. Whatever unburdens your heart and makes your eye merry. I have that small power. But I am not free.

DOOLEY
How much?

She studies their faces a moment.

KIRDRE
I don't trifle in money, for money buys only those things you least need.

RAY
What then? Gold? Silver? Diamonds?

DOOLEY
Name your price, woman.

KIRDRE
Time. One hour of my time for one day of yours.

RAY
What?

DOOLEY
Yes.

KIRDRE
I know it sounds strange, but those are my terms. Time for time. But since my time is more valuable, you must pay with more of yours.
DOOLEY

Yes.

RAY

Hold on. We give you one day of our time for one hour of yours?

KIRDRE

Twenty-four of your miserable hours for one ice-cream-sundae hour of mine. A day of your tawdry lives for an hour of bliss. Would you really choose the heat outside over the icy cool inside?

DOOLEY

I'll do it.

Ray looks from Kirdre to Dooley. She shimmers like desire and purses her lips. No siren ever tempted more.

RAY

I'm game.

KIRDRE

(pushes across glass)
Do the honors, Dooley, while I draw up the contracts.

Dooley pours as she grabs a briefcase and extracts two documents to lay on the bar.

KIRDRE

Skipping over all the legalese, these merely stipulate that you agree to give me one day of your life for one hour of mine.

Ray laughs. Dooley pops with mirth.

KIRDRE

I know how weird it sounds, but the bargain doesn’t require your belief. Just your signature.

She places a gold pen on the bar.

DOOLEY

(grabbing pen)
Who do you send to collect, a leprechaun?

Dooley scrawls his name and hands pen to Ray who hesitates.
KIRDRE
Collections are never a problem.

DOOLEY
A toast!

RAY
Wait!

Pen over paper, Ray stares. Kirdre smiles.

DOOLEY
What are you waiting for? Sign, man, sign.

RAY
It can't be this easy.

DOOLEY
Don't be daft. What are you trading, one day?! Look at her! Smell her! My god, man, You're trading a plough horse for a thoroughbred.

Her smile is Mona Lisa, unreadable. Ray scribbles his signature and grabs his glass.

RAY
To one hour.

DOOLEY
Of the sheerest, grand delight.

They click glasses. The jukebox comes on, playing Irish music. They drink.

INT. DOOLEY'S BAR - 1 HOUR LATER

Dooley does an Irish jig on the bar.

Ray and Kirdre dance amidst the tables as the tune plays. Three people couldn't be happier.

Then, juke box dies.

Dooley keeps dancing.

Ray tries kiss Kirdre, but she steps away.

DOOLEY
(jumping off bar)
I'll play another.
KIRDRE
Time's up.

DOOLEY
It's my turn to dance.

RAY
You can't leave now.

She heads for the bar and her briefcase.

KIRDRE
One hour is all you're entitled to.

RAY
We'll pay more.

DOOLEY
Two days!

KIRDRE
You don't have two days.

RAY
What are you talking about?

She shoves the contracts into her briefcase.

KIRDRE
You both owe me one day, correct?

DOOLEY
To be sure.

KIRDRE
And when might that day be taken?

RAY
When we die.

KIRDRE
Oh, you'll surely die when I take the day.

They gape.

KIRDRE
Life is a continuum, a flow. You can't stop it today and pick it up again the day after tomorrow. The day I take will be your last.

RAY
But--
KIRDRE
Did you think I'd wait until you were doddering fools too miserable to care if you lived another day? Look at me. Do you think I subsist on bad days? Think I feast on misery? No, only the most perfect days, only those giddy days when your heart is light and your laughter pure.

Grabbing her briefcase, she heads for the door.

KIRDRE
If you value your common lives, don't laugh too hard or love too much. No dream vacations, no days of utter self-indulgence. Hide your smiles. Abandon all jokes. Remember that a great happiness will draw me, and when I come, your life will end.

The door opens and closes, and she's gone.

Ray goes to the bar and fills his glass.

DOOLEY
You don't think...

RAY
Nah, that's a load of bullshit.

Dooley pours himself a drink.

DOOLEY
But the way she smelled.

RAY
Crap, pure crap.
    (laughs)
See, nothing. She's wacko.

DOOLEY
A beautiful whacky. I can't smell the sea any more.

RAY
I never could.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nelda, sweaty, stands at the stove, stirring a pan of hot sauce.
Ray enters, drenched in sweat. She waits as he comes over and pecks her cheek.

NELDA
You're late.

RAY
Route was living hell.

NELDA
Did you?

RAY
Too late. I'll see about it tomorrow.

He moves off as her face clouds over.

NELDA
I thought--

RAY
I said TOMORROW!

NELDA
You don't need to yell.

He reaches the door and turns.

RAY
Something, something odd happened to me today. I haven't quite figured it out.

NELDA
Something odd?

RAY
I'm gonna shower, cool down.

NELDA
Was it a woman?

Panic stretches his face a moment.

RAY
Why would you ask that?

NELDA
You smell like, like lilac.

RAY
I smell like ten hours of hauling beer.
He leaves.

Nelda turns to the sauce. A bead of sweat or maybe a tear starts down her cheek.

FADE OUT