

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