

# OLD ORLEANS

A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

*by Elissa Bassist*

CHARACTERS:

OLD ORLEANS

THE VISITOR (HIM)

*A Solitary House in Louisiana in Our Own Time*

## ACT I

OLD ORLEANS *sits strumming her fingernails on a desk in a parlor. Tap, tap, tap. Her skin is dry from too much exposure to wind, so her rough flesh forms intricate designs, a maze of wrinkles and little cracks of blood splayed across her knuckles. She scratches her chin. Adjusts her glasses. Suppresses her loneliness. Kids with bottle caps on their shoes make noise outside near the bus stop. It is the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, the day where time tricks and tumbles just short of expectation. She hasn't seen him in months, maybe years, maybe minutes. And she thinks of HIM less and less too, even though that still means always, even if it means in the spaces between seconds. She twists in her chair. The house is dark, and she is alone inside it. There is a knock at the door. Tap, tap, tap. She doesn't move and sits listening to kids' performance, which is not for her.* THE VISITOR

*will wait. Tap, tap, tap. With the weight of her arms, she lifts herself out of the chair. Old and hunched, she walks to a mirror in the entryway. She extends her dry hand and glides two gnarled fingers around her body in the mirror. THE VISITOR will wait. Her fingers rest on the pelvis, and she remembers. The calluses on his palms, the moles dotting his back, the curvature of his thighs. After the first time, sex became a distancing technique; the more she reached to possess HIM and have HIM entangle her, the better she noticed the gap between two sets of skin, how each could never really absorb the other. Her passion for HIM grew like mold: unavoidable due to exposure and neglect. The mirror cracks under the pressure of her fingers. A spider web of broken glass replaces the reflection of hips. They had talked enough, used up all the words language could offer, each word a step forward and backward. All of their conversations come back to her as one:*

YOUNG ORLEANS

I [verb] you.

THE VISITOR

I similarly feel for you in this way, but only sometimes.

YOUNG ORLEANS

Can you please never again talk to me.

THE VISITOR

No. Yes. Defensive statement. Ultimately, no.

YOUNG ORLEANS

How about we are friends forever.

THE VISITOR

Yes, but let me first say something sexual.

YOUNG ORLEANS

I also like saying sexual things.

THE VISITOR

Pearl necklace.

YOUNG ORLEANS

We get along so well. Why aren't we together?

THE VISITOR

For reasons I'll never explain. I'll lead you on and call you beautiful and not leave you alone when you ask, but I'm still not willing to commit my heart or time to you. So you'll just hang on and wait for something I allude to, but to which I in no way promise or even think about beyond this conversation you're making me have.

## YOUNG ORLEANS

What conversation? I'm busy isolating myself so that I may define every interaction we have; file it as either love or war.

## THE VISITOR

I want to be charming, say sweet things to you, hint at infinity, and then act surprised and offended when you think I mean what I say.

## YOUNG ORLEANS

Fuck you. I mean, I love you. No, I don't mean "love." I mean, what? What if we just stopped talking for a few years. Then I can get over you, move...on the other hand, you may change and care about me even when it's inconvenient.

## THE VISITOR

I'm not listening to you. I am walking away. I have to go.

## YOUNG ORLEANS

I am in so much pain. I can hardly stand it. My life is a sad song. But I like love you, and so I'll stay here and wait for you to return all my medium-requted feelings.

*Young Orleans: Waiting*

*Old Orleans: Waiting*  
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*Old Orleans: Waiting*

*Sixty-three years later and THE VISITOR is outside now just as he's been outside before digging well-worn footprints into the Welcome mat. Each knock is a promise of rescue from wait. Tap, tap, tap. She stares at the floor then looks to the door. She brings her hands to her face, palms facing away, and raises her eyes above her glasses to consider the dried blood on her knuckles. THE VISITOR will wait.*

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