

BRIGHTLY PACKAGED THINGS

a ten-minute play by

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Cast of Characters

REGGIE African-American, late twenties
CRACKER white, late twenties

Setting

A hovel of an apartment opposite a hospital.

The Present.

AN APARTMENT - NIGHT.

A cramped, rundown, dismal studio apartment. CRACKER sits in a chair, staring out the window with a vacant, catatonic expression. He is unshaven and wears jeans and an undershirt. Silence. REGGIE enters with a paper bag. She wears a coat.

REGGIE

We are in for a nasty night tonight, babydoll. Yes, we are. It is coming down like a plague. Your Reggie feels like she's got icebergs floating through her veins.

(She blows on her hands and rubs.)

You miss your Reggie, babydoll?

(No answer.)

She missed you. She always misses her babydoll. Sometimes she misses him before she even leaves. Sometimes she misses him when he's right in the room with her.

(No answer.)

Whatcha doing? You looking out your window?

CRACKER

Mm-hmm.

REGGIE

Anything interesting?

CRACKER

Some guy, getting an enema.

REGGIE

Don't be nasty, babydoll. You know I don't like it when you talk nasty.

(CRACKER points to the window. REGGIE grimaces.)

Why don't they close their shutters or put up some drapes? I've called that hospital a hundred times-

(REGGIE moves to the window.)

CRACKER

Don't shut it.

REGGIE

But it ain't pretty, babydoll.

CRACKER

I like it.

REGGIE

I'll open it when there's something better to watch.

CRACKER

There is nothing better.

REGGIE

I can't agree with that. But since my babydoll's been so good this week...

(She leaves the window and kisses the top of CRACKER'S head.)

Your Reggie's got a surprise for you. You want it now or after I fix supper?

(No response.)

I'll give it to you now.

(REGGIE opens the bag and pulls out a multi-colored winter scarf.)

Isn't that lovely? Yes, it is. Guess where I found it? Outside the hospital. Just lying in a heap of garbage. You want to try it on?

(REGGIE puts the scarf around CRACKER'S neck.)

Oh, babydoll, look how handsome you look. Like Gregory Peck. Course, your Reggie's never seen Gregory Peck, but if I did I bet he'd look just like you do now. Hard to believe someone threw this pretty thing away.

CRACKER

Like me. You found me in the garbage.

REGGIE

Well, I guess that's true. Ain't it funny the treasures you find in the junk? But like they say, babydoll, one body's rotten potato is another body's hashbrowns.

CRACKER

We don't got a phone.

REGGIE

I said hashbrowns, babydoll. Not phone. You can't eat a phone.

CRACKER

No. You said, you said you called the hospital. 'Bout the window. But we don't got a phone.

REGGIE

No, babydoll, that's right. We don't. We most certainly don't have a phone. What I meant was, I've spoken to that nurse or receptionist or whoever that the Lady in White is. You know, the one who sits at that big metal desk?

CRACKER

I've never seen her.

REGGIE

No, babydoll, but I tell you about her, don't I? Anyway, I tell her we can see straight into their operating room every time I pick up your medicine, and she says she tells the doctors, but you know what, babydoll? I don't think she does.

CRACKER

'Cause they keep leaving the windows open.

REGGIE

That's right! You're doing very good tonight. I knew this was gonna be a good day when I found this lucky scarf. Even if the world is coming to a snowy end out there, I can always tell when it's going to be a good day. Did you take your five o'clock pill?

CRACKER

We're out.

REGGIE

Out? Out already? The Lady in White gave me that bottle last Thursday. You haven't been taking more than two a day, have you?

(No answer.)

Now, babydoll, these pills make you better-

CRACKER

No.

REGGIE

Yes.

CRACKER

No.

REGGIE

Yes, they do. They make you better. I know it don't always feel like that, but they do. But remember what I told you the Lady in White said: you take too many, they'll make you sick.

CRACKER

I am sick.

REGGIE

Well, these'll make you sicker than sick. And Reggie doesn't want that. Reggie remembers life before she found her babydoll, so she wants him around just as long as possible.

CRACKER

Not sicker than sick. Just sick.

(REGGIE takes CRACKER'S hand.)

REGGIE

We all got sickness, baby. You just got more than your share. And I got less. That's why we're such a perfect fit. D'you take your pill this morning?

(CRACKER nods.)

Well, that's a small mercy. Tomorrow I'll stop in and see the Lady in White, get you some more. I could've sworn we had enough for the week. You sure you only had the one today?

CRACKER

No. I took some more around noon.

REGGIE

You did? How many more?

(No answer. REGGIE picks up an empty bottle.)

Baby, did you take all the pills that were in here?

(Silence.)

Baby-

CRACKER

I saw a heart. I saw a heart today.

REGGIE

Baby, how many pills were in the bottle? Was it one or two or was it a lot?

CRACKER

Never seen that before. There was this old man. The Doctor cracked open this chest, pulled it right out of his body. Still beating.

REGGIE

Babydoll, your Reggie doesn't remember how many pills were in this bottle when she left this morning. She needs you to remember for her.

CRACKER

He put it in a box. With ice. You should've seen it. When the heart touched the ice, this cloud, this cloud shot out of the box. Like smoke. I thought it was steam. But then I thought maybe it was a soul.

REGGIE

You shouldn't watch things like that. It ain't good for you.

CRACKER

It wasn't scary. Wish you could have seen it. A soul. Escaping into...? Made me feel good.

REGGIE

I'm glad, baby, but I don't think you're feeling good now.

CRACKER

Before he put it in the box, the Doctor, he, he held the heart in his hand. It was beating. Beating in his hand. What do you think it's like? Having, having someone hold your heart? Being touched some place where all you are is heat?

(pause)

I'm cold, Reggie.

REGGIE

Well, let's get your wrapped up.

(She wraps the scarf around him tighter.)

You just - you just need tell me how many pills were in the bottle. If it was a big number, baby, that's bad and Reggie needs to know. Baby?

CRACKER

It was a bad number.

(CRACKER closes his eyes.)

REGGIE

Babydoll? Baby, can you hear me? Baby, I'm going across the street to the Lady in White. I'm gonna get her and the doctor, and they're gonna make you better, alright? But I need you to stay awake? Can you do that? Babydoll?

CRACKER

Watch for my soul, Reggie.

REGGIE

No, baby!

CRACKER

You like pretty things. Watch it. But you have to, you have to watch close. It comes out fast and gray.

(CRACKER slumps down in his chair.)

REGGIE

Babydoll? No, no, no. Baby, get up. Come on, on your feet!

(REGGIE tries to pull CRACKER to his feet. He slumps to the floor, his weight pulling REGGIE down.)

Come on, baby, get up. You aren't gonna leave your Reggie?

What's she gonna do without her babydoll? Open your eyes.

(CRACKER does not respond. REGGIE slaps him.)

Open your eyes!

(She slaps him harder.)

You hear me? Open 'em! Open your eyes!

(She slaps him over and over again.)

Open 'em! Open 'em! Open 'em!

(She pummels his limp body with her fists.)

OPEN YOUR EYES!

(CRACKER doesn't move.)

Baby? Baby, don't go. Don't go leaving your Reggie. Don't leave her alone with no one to hold her heart.

(REGGIE cradles the body.)

END OF PLAY