

Raised in Captivity

Nicky Silver

Act 1, scene 3. The Dixons' living room. It is the middle of the night.

Bernadette (early 30s) and Kip Dixon (mid 30s) have been married for eight years. Kip is a dentist but hates teeth. He comes from a very poor background. After graduating from high school he robbed a man on the subway and used his credit cards to buy tickets to fly to Europe. He parhanded until he got a job as a guide at the 'depressing' Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. This was where he first met Bernadette who was on a European tour with her domineering mother. Bernadette is highly strung and often on the verge of tears: her twin brother, Sebastian, thinks she is 'completely insane'. As she is all too aware, her life has an aimless quality. She spends her time shopping, while her contemporaries pursue high-flying careers. She is obsessed with her weight and has a 'neurotic relationship with food'. Bernadette's mother recently died in a freak accident and this scene occurs the night after the funeral. 'Kip is looking out the window. After a moment Bernadette enters wearing a bathrobe.'

BERNADETTE. Kip?

KIP. Did I wake you?

BERNADETTE. What are you doing?

KIP. It's a beautiful night. The clouds have passed.

BERNADETTE. I woke up and the bed was empty. I didn't know where you were.

KIP. I didn't mean to wake you.

BERNADETTE. I got scared.

KIP. Come look at this.

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BERNADETTE. Is something out there?

KIP. Come here.

BERNADETTE. I'm tired. It's been a very long, trying day.

KIP (*turning away*). Then go to bed.

BERNADETTE. Are you coming?

KIP. No.

BERNADETTE. What are you looking at? (*She goes to the window.*)

KIP. The moon.

BERNADETTE. The moon? The moon, Kip? You're looking at the moon?

KIP. Isn't it beautiful?

BERNADETTE. It looks dirty.

KIP. What would you call that color?

BERNADETTE (*exasperated*). White?

KIP. No, I don't think so. It's definitely not white.

BERNADETTE. Who cares?

KIP. Ecrú, maybe. Or eggshell!

BERNADETTE. It's a big, dirty circle in the sky. Come back to bed.

KIP. Something happened today!

BERNADETTE. It's not that I'm not fascinated -

KIP. Listen to me.

BERNADETTE. Although, I'm not.

KIP. Do you realize that I never knew anyone who died before? It's true. My whole life, I never knew anyone who died. Isn't that startling?

BERNADETTE. I don't understand!

KIP. Did you know you're going to die? I didn't! I mean I had the information, tucked away in some remote corner of my brain, but seeing your mother, lifeless, still - seeing someone I didn't even like as an object made my own death a very tangible entity.

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BERNADETTE. Everyone's going to die! Everyone who's born will die.

KIP. That's a very bleak point of view, Bernadette.

BERNADETTE. Life is finite. Thank God.

KIP (*with great importance*). I don't want to be a dentist. **BERNADETTE** (*stunned, then*). No one *wants* to be a dentist!

KIP. I don't even know why I became one.

BERNADETTE. For the same reason as everyone else! You didn't have the grades for medical school.

KIP. Do you know what teeth are?

BERNADETTE. That's a rhetorical question, I assume.

KIP. They're millstones around my neck.

BERNADETTE. They are?

KIP. Yes.

BERNADETTE. Teeth?

KIP. They're dragging me down, into a vat of dire ugliness.

BERNADETTE. Teeth?

KIP. I look into mouths all day, and if I felt anything I'd burst into tears. I never mentioned it because I try to be positive.

BERNADETTE. Try harder.

KIP. I spend my life staring into gaping, gagging crypts filled with blood and drool.

BERNADETTE. That's very descriptive.

KIP (*excited*). I used to think I could make the mouth my canvas. I thought I could create the universe in miniature. But there is no poetry in teeth. When I was a child I saw things! I went to the museum with my mother. She dragged me from room to room, whispering into my ear the stories of the saints in the paintings. When I could, I ran off and found a room with a bench in the middle. I curled up and fell asleep. Then I opened my eyes. I saw a painting: *The City Rises* by Boccioni. It was beautiful, a

scene of chaos with fire and horses and people in panic made up of a million splatters of color. And I stared at it. I studied it. And the colors came alive! Do you understand? **BERNADETTE.** You had a dream.

KIP. I didn't! I don't know what it was, but it wasn't a dream! I told my father about it, that night at dinner. He broke all my crayons and lined the garbage with my drawing paper. He thought God was dead and I was proof.

BERNADETTE. I've lost the thread.

KIP. He taught me *not to see*.

BERNADETTE. What's the point of this!?

KIP (*after a moment, simply*). Do you love me, Bernadette? **BERNADETTE.** Yes.

KIP. We're partners, aren't we?

BERNADETTE. Yes. Can we please go to bed?

KIP (*grandiose*). I'm going to be a painter! I want to learn to see again. I think it's possible.

BERNADETTE. That's what this is all about?

KIP. Don't belittle my rebirth!

BERNADETTE. Fine. Paint if you want. Paint until your arms fall off.

KIP. I mean full-time.

BERNADETTE. Pardon me?

KIP. I've looked into my last mouth.

BERNADETTE. You can't be serious!

KIP. You said you loved me. We're partners.

BERNADETTE (*m disbelief*). You're not going to work?

KIP. I'm going to work. I'm going to paint!

BERNADETTE. What kind of work is that?

KIP. Work worth doing. We don't need the money. We have your mother's now, and—

BERNADETTE. Oh my God . . . Oh God. You're just—

KIP. Think of possibilities, Bernadette. You have no imagination.

BERNADETTE. I'm going to cry.

KIP. Do you want to go on like this for the rest of our lives?

BERNADETTE. Yes!

KIP. I want something else. You won't get what you don't want. I want a different kind of life.

BERNADETTE. I DON'T! There's nothing wrong with my life the way it is! I'm going to bed! I'd like to pretend this never happened. We never had this conversation.

KIP. Don't be angry. This is wonderful!

BERNADETTE. I think it's pretty goddamn terrible! I woke up this morning next to my husband, now - who are you?!

KIP. I'm me.

BERNADETTE. You are not! I don't want to talk about it.

KIP. I hoped you'd understand.

BERNADETTE. We'll talk about it in the morning.

KIP. I hoped you'd be happy.

BERNADETTE. I'm going to bed.
(*KIP takes her hand.*)

KIP. Look at me.

BERNADETTE (*angry*). What?

KIP. Everything looks new to me.

BERNADETTE. I'm tired.
(*He touches her face.*)

KIP. I've never seen you at all.
(*He takes her hand. She turns to leave. He doesn't release her.*)

BERNADETTE. Let go of me.

KIP. Your eyes.

BERNADETTE. It's late.

KIP. It's morning.

BERNADETTE. Please.

KIP. Your hair.

BERNADETTE. It's dirty.

KIP. It's perfect.

BERNADETTE. Let go.

KIP. You're beautiful.

BERNADETTE. I'm not.

KIP. To me.

BERNADETTE. You have . . .

KIP. You are.

BERNADETTE. Really lost your mind.
(*He kisses her. It quickly becomes passionate and they sink to the floor, making love. Fadeout.*)

COMMENTARY: Nicky Silver has written a screwball comedy dealing with the serious subjects of guilt, redemption and self-punishment. Kip and Bernadette hate their lives and feel imprisoned by their dysfunctional daily existence. They are both self-centred and egotistical, unwilling and unable to accommodate any opinions that contradict their own. The funeral of his hated mother-in-law proves to be a turning point for Kip. He realises he has been in denial for too long and finally finds the motivation to quit being a deniust. His decision is made easier by the knowledge that Bernadette will soon inherit money from her mother's estate. Notice how Kip's calm conviction comes into conflict with Bernadette's scepticism and scorn. He has experienced a life-enhancing breakthrough; she has not, and absolutely resists being caught up in his fanciful artistic enthusiasms. Despite the serious subject matter there is a darkly farcical quality to the writing - especially whenever teeth are mentioned - and this requires expert timing from the actors. There may be a temptation to make these characters too irritating but you must try to find a sympathetic core, otherwise you will instantly lose your audience's interest and attention.