

WAITING TO EXHALE

JAMES

Excuse me. Is anyone sitting here?

BERNADINE

No. No one's sitting there.

JAMES

Cognac, please.

BARTENDER

Yes, sir.

JAMES

My name is James Wheeler. How do you do? (Nothing)

BARTENDER

(Bartender brings his drink) Here you are, sir.

JAMES

Thank you. (Takes a drink... pause) So, do you have a name?

BERNADINE

Bernadine.

JAMES

Bernadine. Um... hmmm. My this is a... pretty place. But I have to admit; I haven't seen anything as splendid as you since I've been here. (Off her look...) Ok. Hold on, now. Hold on. You don't have to give me that look! Look, I haven't seen the sun for four days now. It's been one meeting, after the other, after the other... and now I'm finished. So, I decided to come downstairs, have myself a drink, and in the morning I look forward to returning home to my lovely wife. (Takes a drink) Salud! (Pause) So... why are you sitting here all alone? Ok, wait. Hold on now. You don't have to answer that. You don't know me. I mean, you don't know me from a can of paint. And here I am all up in your Kool-Aid, and don't even know the flavor.

BERNADINE

I'm getting a divorce, James.

JAMES

Ahh. I am sorry to hear that.

BERNADINE

It happens, huh? (Pause) And it just occurred to me that... I've lost something that once meant everything... and it hurts. (Pause) [I gave him 21 years of my life, and he left me for a white woman.] And right now, I'm just... I'm really pissed about it. But you know what really gets me? I didn't have a plan 'B'. My marriage was supposed to last.

JAMES

Mmm.

BERNADINE

So I guess that's why I'm here.

JAMES

Well... I can tell you one thing though.

BERNADINE

Yeah, what's that?

JAMES

You're one brave woman. You bad!

BERNADINE

No.

JAMES

Oh, yes. And I hope you recognize that.

BERNADINE

No, I really don't feel like that, James.

JAMES

Well, you're sitting here all alone. Ain't a black person in sight... and you're sitting here looking like everything is all right. You know... and your make-up is flawless.

JAMES

Oh, that... come on, now.

BERNADINE

You've taken his best shot... and you're still here. Splendid.

BERNADINE

You just know me so well.

JAMES

No, no, no, no, I don't know you. But I know a fighter when I see one. And I could tell that... with one look in your eyes.

BERNADINE

What are you... a psychiatrist or something?

JAMES

Nope. I'm a civil rights attorney. My practice is in Washington. (Pause) I'm going through something similar. My wife is dying... of breast cancer.

BERNADINE

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry to hear that.

JAMES

Bernadine... you ever watched someone dying? I tell you, watching her suffer, just kills a bit of me everyday. And I can't help but think about all the plans we made. Like, we were supposed to retire to St. Thomas... you know... live by the beach. She loves the water. And I'd get the coconut oil and rub all over her body. Yeah, she is definitely a... I tell you, I wish I could just have a piece of her that I could keep safe. Just something. Something more than a bunch of memories. Anyway... you look like you're out.

BERNADINE

Hmmm...

JAMES

How about a... refill?

BERNADINE

Yeah, ok.

JAMES

Ok. (to bartender) She'll have another of whatever it is she's got.

BERNADINE

Scotch and soda.

JAMES

Ooh... I'm scared of you.

(Bernadine laughs)

JAMES

[Should we go up?]

BERNADINE

[Yes.] Ooh... I always get so confused. I'm just... I'm ok.

JAMES

Nervous?

BERNADINE

Yeah. I'm a little nervous.

JAMES

If you're having second thoughts...

BERNADINE

No, I'm... I'm having all kinds of thoughts.

JAMES

Well, if it's any consolation... I've never done this before.

BERNADINE

Are you sure?

JAMES

I haven't made love to a woman in over a year. Lauren stopped wanting to, so... (pause) I've got two things I want to say to you.

BERNADINE

No, you don't have to...

JAMES

No, I do... because you may change your mind afterwards. You remember how you were saying that the woman your husband was marrying, I mean your ex-husband... that she was white?

BERNADINE

Yes.

JAMES

Well... so is my wife. Look, Bernadine, I could sit here and say... that the reason I'm staying with her is because she's dying, or that it's my obligation, or a whole bunch of... stuff. But the truth of the matter is... I love her. She is the only woman I have ever loved. And I would never leave her under any circumstances.

BERNADINE

It hurts like hell.

JAMES

Yeah.

BERNADINE

Someone felt that way about me once. But he stopped.  
(Pause) What do you want to do tonight?

JAMES

Make tonight beautiful.