

The Coyness of the Carp

Samuel Smith

Chester's house. A very low level light reveals nothing more than block shapes of a living room setting.

Darren enters the room, hunched and creeping - frisking furniture. He moves methodically. Chester, a man of around sixty, enters the room unbeknownst to Darren, carrying an old cane like a weapon. Chester flicks the light switch.

(Lights up.)

Chester:

'Ay! What are you doing in my house?

(Darren is barely startled.)

Darren:

I'm just searching for something that's no concern of yours. I'd recommend turning round and walking back out of this room.

Chester:

Stop it. I do not know you. Get out of my house.

Darren:

I'll leave when I've got what I came for.

Chester:

I will hit you with my cane. I'm not afraid.

Darren:

You hit me with that cane and I'll punch those glasses into your eyeballs. Don't come any closer.

Chester:

You will not come into my house and threaten me like this. Please leave. Right now, leave my house.

Darren:

When I have what I need, I'll leave. I'll be gone soon so go back to bed Grandad.

(Chester walks forward and whips Darren on the upper thigh with his cane. Darren stops and turns, slowly.)

Darren:

It's men like you that make me want to rip your face off. Men who live alone in their house, with no friends. Dark windows, curtains twitching. The creepy, lonely man who gets whispered about when he walks by.

Chester:

What do you mean? I'm a good man. I still work, I'm not a menace to anyone. Not like you. Breaking in to an old man's home - middle of the night, when he's sleeping. What sort of man are you?

Darren:

Me? Whatever sort of man I am, I'm not a pathetic as you.

Chester:

You don't know me.

Darren:

I know what you do. Seeing girls, keeping the things they leave behind.

Chester:

I don't... What do you mean?

Darren:

You can drop the shite. I'm in your house now -

Chester:

I don't understand -

Darren:

Your female visitor. The one you've been seeing. The one that's come here. Stayed here - You're a dirty man. A scummy man.

Chester:

...Gina. You know Gina.

Darren:

Know her? I'm her brother, mate. Really I should cave your head in, but tonight I'm only here to get her necklace back. The one that she left here, the last time she was over.

(Chester slumps into his chair)

Chester:

This. This is a little overwhelming for an old man.

Darren:

Listen, yeah. Don't remind me that you're an old man. Tonight I found out my sister is providing services to the gentlemen of this estate. I'm not feeling particularly comfortable. I just want to get what I came for and get out.

Chester:

She's not providing... services to me. She is my last little piece of comfort...

Darren:

(Interrupting) Look, I don't want to know how she comforts you - all I need to know is where the necklace is and I'll be gone.

Chester:

No! You do need to know. I don't pay her to be with me; I pay her for her romance. Her time, her love. I pay her to lay in my arms as I fall asleep.

Darren:

Listen yeah, she's come clean to me tonight about what she's been doing. (To himself) I didn't realise. I didn't know she needed money that badly. I'm so thick...

Chester:

I know what she does but she doesn't do that with me.

Darren:

What do you mean?

Chester:

I mean I don't use her for...

Darren:

-Right, right ok. So you don't... pay her for anything else.

Chester:

I don't pay her for anything else, no.

Darren:

But you do pay other girls?

Chester:

I pay for what I need. I'm not a greedy man. I'm a lonely man.

Darren:

Yeah you are. Tricking yourself into feeling like you've got some power over these girls or something.

Chester:

I'm not a fool, Darren -

Darren:

Whoa! How do you know my name?

Chester:

I told you, I talk to your sister. And ask her about her life and her family. She speaks very well of you - Although I'm not impressed by what I have seen so far.

Darren:

What do you mean she talks about me?

Chester:

She tells me about what a bright young man you are and how much potential you have. But that you are wasting it dealing on the streets. She says that you write stories for your daughter and read them to her.

Darren:

She told you about my daughter... Christ. What... I don't know what's going on at the moment.

Chester:

Sit yourself down. Just for a minute.

(Darren sits down.)

Darren:

Right, so I deal a bit of skunk to keep myself ticking over -I don't do it for me, I do it for my littlen. It might not be the best way to get by but I'm doing what I can.

Chester:

I understand. Although, I don't have children myself.

(There is a short silence)

Chester:

I have to ask, Darren. Why have you broken in to my house this night?

Darren:

She didn't ask me to break in to your house and get it. The necklace was one that I bought her after I won a fishing competition. I didn't want her to be without it, it means too much.

Chester:

Yes, it has a Carp on it.

Darren:

I wanted to buy her something nice to, you know, say thank you for encouraging me. And then when I won, I felt like I owed her something special. So I bought her that necklace with a fish on it and she wears it all the time - She never takes it off. So when I saw her without it, I asked her and she started fumbling over her words, like she was hiding something. Eventually she told me. The whole story, about everything. And that she'd left it at one of the men's houses. I asked her which one, but she wouldn't say. I said I'd kick down every door in this block if she didn't tell me. So she gave me your address.

Chester:

I see. ...Does she... Does she see lots of men.

Darren:

What? I have no idea. And I don't want to know!

Chester:

Sorry. I didn't mean to ask, I just... It makes me feel so strange to hear that. Even though I know it happens.

Darren:

Fine. Don't worry yourself. But you know, it aches in my gut to know what she's done to herself. Just to scrape a few quid together.

Chester:

No, I know it's difficult.

(Another short silence)

Darren:

Ok, right. I need to get my head round this. So you just meet up with Gina and talk and chat and what not? Then why did she take the necklace off?

(Chester takes a breath and adjusts his pyjamas and dressing gown.)

Chester:

I... I wanted her to put on some cocoa butter. On her neck and on her shoulders and chest so she took her necklace off.

Darren:

That's disgusting. Why are you making her put food on herself, is that some weird fantasy?

Chester:

It's not food, you ignorant fool. It's moisturiser us *black* folk use.

Darren:

Oh. Ok. But Gina is white.

Chester: (with forced laughter.)

Well, I realise that. I'm 60 years old, I haven't lost my mind yet...

Darren:

So why is it then?

Chester:

My wife used to use it. I like the smell.

Darren:

What? You have a wife?

Chester:

Only in spirit. She's with God not me. He took her from me 14 years ago. I trust his plan, but I am not content with it. And I am angry.

Darren:

I'm sorry to hear that mate. But I still don't understand. The cocoa butter? What do you do with it.

Chester:

It reminds me so much of her. All I have to do is close my eyes and that smell - it brings her back to me. I just asked Gina if she would put it on and if she could just lie there in my arms. So that's what we did. And she stayed with me and we spoke and then eventually I fell to sleep. When I woke again, she had left. But she had forgotten to put her necklace back on.

Darren:

Oh, I see... look, I'll just take the necklace and leave you be.

(Darren stands up.)

Chester:

I think I'd rather give it back to her myself.

Darren:

No. No, it's best for me to get it now. I'll take it and give her it tonight.

Chester:

But she can come and get it herself.

Darren:

This isn't a battle of wills, this is happening. I'm taking it back tonight.

Chester:

No, you don't need to take it. She can get it when she comes back.

Darren:

Ok, I'm starting to get angry now. So just tell me where it is - I'll get it and go.

Chester:

I won't tell you.

(Darren starts to physically overbear on Chester.)

Darren:

If you don't tell me, I'm going to rip this room inside out until I get what I came for. Where is it?

Chester:
...Please. Let me hold on to it.

(Darren's rage takes over. He throws Chester to the ground and begins pacing up and down. Erratically rearranging things to find the necklace.)

Darren:
There's not a thing I won't do to get that necklace back.

(Darren goes out of the room, offstage.)

Darren: (from offstage)
I'll find it. Believe me I'll find it. Even if I'm here until morning, I'll find it.

Chester (breathless)
Darren. No. I have it here. Please.

(There is a short wait. All that can be heard is Chester panting on the floor. Darren comes back into the room. Much more subdued and calm than before.)

Darren:
Can I have it please?

(Chester clammers into his chair again and reached into his Pyjama pocket. He pulls out the necklace and hands it to Darren. Darren looks at the necklace and puts it in his own pocket. He walks across the stage to leave the room. He stops at the doorway and turns back to Chester.)

Darren:
I just saw a picture of a lady and who I presume is you. Is that... I take it that is-

Chester:
My wife. Yes that is her. Bea her name is.

Darren:
In the photo, you seem to be holding hands so tightly. You must miss her.

Chester:
What do you expect? I never wanted to let her go.

(He walks towards Chester. Helps him to his feet, hands him his cane.)

Darren:
I've woken you up, the least I can do is help you back to bed. I'll tell you a story...

(The pair walk off stage with Darren assisting Chester as they walk.)

End Scene.