

Quandary

Written by

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First Draft

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Officers' quarters on a SpaceFleet ship. BASIL, a silver-skinned synthetic lifeform is working at his console when ZOE, his human partner who has wild chestnut hair enters and drops a tablet in front of him.

ZOE

(frustrated)

I hate theatre. I passed the bar. I have a standing offer from the diplomatic corps. I quit.

BASIL

(calm, rational)

While the diplomatic corps would benefit from your presence, I am certain you are not quite ready to abandon a promising stage career.

(beat)

What is the real issue?

ZOE

Can you join me on the sofa. This conversation requires tea.

BASIL

Of course. I would be happy to.

BASIL leaves his console and moves toward a small kitchen console where he boils water while ZOE moves to a nearby cabinet and pulls out two mugs. TOGETHER they make tea and carry the mugs downstage center to their couch.

BASIL

What is your dilemma?

ZOE

Mac asked me to play the lead in his new production of Cabaret. And, I mean, Sally Bowles is a dream role. Edgy character. Iconic song. Musical with a message. I'd be stupid to say no... but...

BASIL

But what?

ZOE

But he's changing the setting. Instead of doing it on Earth, against the rise of Nazi Germany, and all that, he's setting it on Remilak, during the Bezian occupation.

BASIL

So he is making the Bezians into the Nazis?

ZOE

Yes.

BASIL

That would seem to be a relevant update to the material. We are still learning of some of the atrocities committed by the Bezian regime, and many Remilaki remain separated from their family units.

ZOE

I know all that. I know it's an important story, both in the original setting and in the updated one. I don't have a problem with the resetting. I have a problem with the fact that I'm not Remilaki.

BASIL

I do not understand.

ZOE

Well, don't you think it would be more appropriate for Mac to tell this story with actual Remilaki actors? People who are really from the world he's trying to depict. It's not like there's any shortage of artists from Remilak, and it's not fair that any time a project like this comes along the best parts go to human - or human-appearing - performers.

BASIL

Is it not possible that Mac offered you the part because he truly believes you are the best person for it?

ZOE

It's possible, sure, but... it's equally possible that I'm just the latest in a centuries-long tradition of white-washing and cultural appropriation.

BASIL

White-washing?

ZOE

It was especially prevalent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, though it began to improve after the Cultural Uprising of 2025. It was the practice of casting white actors in roles that were written for characters of color, which was only marginally less offensive than when
(MORE)

ZOE (cont'd)

white actors wore blackface or yellowface to portray those characters, often with the intent to mock them.

BASIL

But, we no longer live in a society where we cast only white humanoids. For that matter, pure humans are an ethnic minority in today's galaxy. You yourself, Zoe, though you identify as human, have a significant percentage of aboriginal Centauran DNA.

As well, Coalition culture encourages us to embrace the differences in our individual traditions and practices and learn from them, and believes that to do so is to honor the diversity the Coalition of Aligned Worlds encompasses.

ZOE

I guess it's my turn to 'not understand.'

BASIL

The Terran philosopher Alan Watts once said "Through our eyes, the universe is perceiving itself. Through our ears, the universe is listening to its harmonies. We are the witnesses through which the universe becomes conscious of its glory, of its magnificence." By 'trying on' aspects of another culture, so long as it is done respectfully - by 'stepping into another's skin' as you do when you inhabit the characters you play, you are granting yourself a new perspective not just on the culture you are attempting to represent, but on your own culture as well.

ZOE

I... guess. But... that doesn't necessarily make it okay.

BASIL

Have you asked Mac why he wants you to play the part?

ZOE

(sheepishly)

No. First I was excited, and honored, and then I started reading the treatment and background material, and then I felt guilty for being cast when there are so many Remilaki actors who aren't working because they can't afford transit off-world where the jobs are.

BASIL

The performances won't be on Remilak?

ZOE

They haven't got a theatre big enough. They're still rebuilding so much infrastructure. You know that. I think... I think I would feel less bad about it if I could find a way to give something back, but then we're have the whole Human Savior issue going on, and I don't want that either.

BASIL

Human... Savior?

ZOE

You're SpaceFleet. Don't you know?

BASIL

I honestly do not.

ZOE

Something happens to a less technological culture or society and SpaceFleet comes in and saves the day and sets up everything in the Coalition model.

BASIL

You know we have restrictions about what technology we can and cannot share...

ZOE

And *you* know that there are many, many ways around those restrictions, and invariably cultures lose something when they join us. I mean, sure, they gain things as well... but... anyway... when it comes to the human savior thing, I meant... we do a play and we commit proceeds to helping a cause because we know that theatre-goers want to feel like they're helping something, but we never pay attention to where the money really goes, or whether it really serves the community or culture it's meant to help.

BASIL

I believe I understand your quandary. (beat) May I ask you a question?

ZOE

Always.

BASIL

Do you *want* to play this part.

ZOE

Gods, yes.

BASIL

And if you could find a way to legitimately give something back to the Remilaki, would you accept Mac's offer?

ZOE

Yes. Of course I would.

BASIL

Then perhaps we should find a way to do that.

ZOE

We?

BASIL

In my studies of human relationships I have learned that - no... this is not about study. We have been a couple for five point three seven years, and married for three point two. I could not truly call myself your partner if I did not support you in your endeavors or help you find solutions to your -

ZOE

(Interrupting)

Quandary?

BASIL

Exactly.

ZOE

(slowly, as though
she's thinking as
she speaks)

I saw a documentary once about a twenty-first century organization that used to go into refugee camps and use theatre games - improv and circus skills and storytelling - to engage kids. Give them a chance to just... be kids. To play. I've been thinking that the Remilaki might benefit from a program like that.

BASIL

It would combine your experience interning with Protocol and Diplomacy when you were still a student here on the ship with your university training and your theatrical experience.

ZOE

I know.

BASIL

It would be a lot of work.

ZOE

I know.

BASIL

But I believe there would be matching grants available from Coalition sources if you wished to approach them.

ZOE

I know that, too, but... I kind of think it might be better to set this up as an NGO.

BASIL
It is a valid option.

ZOE
So... you like the idea?

BASIL
I believe it has merit. Yes.

ZOE
Would you be willing to take some time off and participate?

BASIL
Of course. But there is a first step you must take.

ZOE
Oh?

BASIL
You must call Mac and tell him you are taking the part.

ZOE
Right. That.

BASIL
Yes. That.

ZOE
We never drank our tea.

BASIL
We can make more.

ZOE
Mmm. We can. Maybe... Kiss me first?

BASIL
Gladly.

BASIL leans close to ZOE and touches his lips to hers in a kiss that is at first, gentle, but grows in passion as his hands reach to tangle in her hair and hers come to rest flat on his chest.

BLACKOUT