

Etudes

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First Draft

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The captain's quarters of a SpaceFleet ship. BASIL, silver-skinned, slightly weathered with age is at his computer console. ZOE, showing the signs of age - crows feet, smile lines, an economy of movement she's never had before, enters from the bedroom, carrying a packing crate.

ZOE

(sets crate on the dining table, stage left)

This is the last one. All that's left is what we need accessible for the trip. (beat) I hate packing.

BASIL

It is odd, is it not, that I am in a career that is typically more transitory but you are the one of us who has had to pack and relocate more often.

ZOE

Most of those relocations were coming home to you between gigs, though, so... worth it, in the end.

BASIL

I am glad you think so.

ZOE

You about done... I thought... It might be nice if we had one more dance on the observation deck before we left the ship for good.

BASIL

(taps a few last keys with a flourish)

I have just signed the orders transferring command of the *Calypso* to Barrett. (beat) I am certain she will make us proud.

ZOE

She's a credit to you, that's for sure.

BASIL

To you as well, dearest. You may not have given birth to her, but you are her mother in every other sense - you nurtured her, you served as her confidante, you -

ZOE

(interrupting)

Loved her. I loved her, Basil, just the way I've always loved you. Except you came into my life as the older, wiser adult, and I got to be in hers from the start.

BASIL

That is true.

BASIL steps around his console and embraces ZOE, nuzzling her hair for a moment before he speaks again.

BASIL

You still smell like grapefruit and sunshine.

They kiss.

ZOE

And you still taste like cashews.

BASIL

If you wish to go dancing, you should change.

ZOE

(looks down at her
ripped jeans and
tank top)

What, you don't want to scandalize the crew with my flagrant disregard for the dress code?

BASIL

Perhaps I wish them to remember you in your most beautiful state, so they will know precisely what they will be missing.

ZOE

(laughing)

Tease. Alright. I'll be right back.

She exits the way she entered, and the lights...

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE TWO

The observation deck on a SpaceFleet ship. It's at the top of the ship, with a clear dome over the top. Three sides of the stage should be starscapes. The set should feel like a bubble in space.

The lights are dim as BASIL and ZOE enter.

BASIL
(reacting to the dark room)

The motion sensors on the lights must be disabled. Allow me.

ZOE
No, wait... let's just enjoy the view for a moment...

They move downstage center and act as if they're observing a gorgeous view, while the others in the room stealthily form a half circle around them.

ZOE
I'm going to miss this. You'll have to paint it for me when we get home.

BASIL
I will endeavor to do it justice. (beat) But we came here for a final dance. If you are ready?

ZOE
Oh, I think I am... now.

BASIL
Environment - engage lights. Level three.

The lights rise to a level appropriate for a romantic dance.

BASIL
Environment - engage music program, rathburn-three-five.

A soft waltz begins to play. BASIL turns to ZOE and wordlessly invites her to dance. SHE accepts.

ZOE
 (musing, while
 dancing)
 I've missed waltzing with you.

BASIL
 We have not danced in a long time.

ZOE
 No... it's not in fashion any more for diplomatic functions.
 Perhaps it will be again, someday. Or maybe we can host
 grand salons once a year at home... show off your art...
 invite the kids to perform...

BASIL
 (getting into the
 spirit of things)
 Barrett can have her best flight crew perform aerial
 demonstrations.

ZOE
 Ooh. I like it. And we'll finish with a ball.

BASIL
 Of course.

ZOE
 (sighing)
 So much has changed, Basil. When we met, you were primarily
 a scientist, an explorer... then the war happened, and I was
 the wife of a soldier, a battle commander, and finally we
 built peace again, and now...

BASIL
 (picking up her
 thought)
 ...and now, retirement. Do you recall, Zoe, when I referred
 to the different changes and evolutions in our relationship
 as 'etudes' for us to master?

ZOE
 I do. It was an apt metaphor.

BASIL
 Retirement...

ZOE
 ... from the 'fleet anyway, not like we're retiring from
 life...

BASIL
 No. But it is just another etude, Zoe. And we will master
 it. As we always have. I believe... *(He hesitates*
 (MORE)

BASIL (cont'd)
spinning her under his arm and then back again ... I
believe we can master anything we attempt together.

ZOE
(with warmth and
affection)
There you go, being right again.

FADE TO BLACK

ACT TWOSCENE ONE

Outside a house in a jungle setting. Beyond the house there's a lagoon. We see only the corner of the house with the door. As the lights come up a shuttlecraft has just landed near the house (smoke is coming from the end and lights are on). The ramp descends and BASIL and ZOE exit the shuttle.

So... ZOE

Zoe? BASIL

ZOE
It feels anticlimactic somehow. So many times, we've come here for extended vacations. We built George and Barrett here. We raised Lizzie here. (blushes) We *made* Lizzie here.

BASIL
And now we are here to stay... but we will still travel when we wish to. Barrett has already asked that we come for the launch of the *Calypso II* when she's ready.

ZOE
I know, but...

BASIL
(wrapping his arm around his wife's waist)
Etudes, dearest. It is only more etudes. George wished me to wait until we were home to tell you, but he and Charles have been approved to adopt. They have asked to visit with their new daughter next month.

ZOE
They chose a girl?

BASIL
Apparently, she chose them.

Human?
ZOE

Cerulean.
BASIL

ZOE
Wow. That will be interesting. And I'll finally have someone to swim with.

BASIL
Yes, yes you will. (beat) Shall we go home?

ZOE
We are home. (beat, then wryly) But let's go inside.

ZOE wraps her arm around BASIL, so that they're walking into the house wrapped around each other.

BLACKOUT