

SMILING AT GRIEF

ANTONIO: A sailor. He/Him.

SEBASTIAN: A noble man. He/Him.

LOCATION: On board a pirate ship.

TIME: Vaguely 1600s.

NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT: Loose adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* that analyzes Antonio and Sebastian's relationship prior to the start of the play. Does not require previous reading of the play. Is not intended to be read with exact historical accuracy in mind. While genderbending casting is permissible by the playwright, they would prefer that the characters be cast with the intention of the story in mind (to portray a gay/queer relationship).

In Antonio's Cabin

(Sebastian slowly wakes, taking in the empty room)

SEBASTIAN: Hello? *(He stands, and lists to the side suddenly, falling to the floor)*

SEBASTIAN: Dammit. *(Tries to stand again)*

(Antonio enters)

SEBASTIAN: *(Startled)* Who are you?

ANTONIO: Your savior. Can you not stand?

SEBASTIAN: The floor is moving. I might throw up. Why is the floor moving?

ANTONIO: You're on the ocean, sir, have you forgotten?

SEBASTIAN: The floor is moving *much* more than it should be.

ANTONIO: Come, let me help you lie down. You've been thrown around amongst the waves a bit too much, I wager.

(Antonio helps Sebastian into the cot and Sebastian collapses)

SEBASTIAN: Water. Please.

(Antonio fetches him water)

SEBASTIAN: The light is blinding.

ANTONIO: It's only a few candles. I can't imagine what you would say about the sun.

SEBASTIAN: Oh. Is it daytime?

ANTONIO: Not quite. It was when you joined us aboard this fine vessel. You've been asleep for a day and a half, we worried that you'd never wake.

SEBASTIAN: Who— who are you? Truly.

ANTONIO: A sailor who pulled you from the mouth of mother nature herself. She had her claws in you— you were nearly drowned when we saw you amidst the storm, clutching to a plank of wood. You didn't get a word out when we pulled you aboard, you must have felt you were safe and fell completely unconscious.

SEBASTIAN: Does this sailor have a name so that I might thank him?

ANTONIO: Antonio. Captain Antonio to the crew above us, but here, I am simply Antonio. Does this waterboarded fellow have a name that I might call him by?

(Pause)

SEBASTIAN: You may call me Roderigo.

(Antonio smiles— he senses the lie)

ANTONIO: You were saved by a shred of luck and my fine eyes, Roderigo.

SEBASTIAN: And God's grace.

ANTONIO: Second to my sailor's eyesight, of course.

SEBASTIAN: Of course. Credit where it is due.

ANTONIO: What boat did you fall from, Roderigo? We might be able to find a port where you might reunite with some of the other passengers.

SEBASTIAN: There isn't a point. The ship capsized. It was a hell-ish storm.

ANTONIO: What of your travel mates? Surely, you want to check to see if they have survived.

SEBASTIAN: I watched that ship sink below the waves, fall apart piece by piece. I watched each passenger swallowed by the sea, unable to save them. I watched nature's wrath at her most cruel. There were no survivors.

ANTONIO: Except for yourself.

SEBASTIAN: Except for myself.

ANTONIO: You mourn. I can see it in your eyes; who do you mourn for, Roderigo?

SEBASTIAN: I mourn for no one. I must start a new life from this— there is nothing, no one to return to.

ANTONIO: Your new life begins now. What will you do with it?

SEBASTIAN: I'm awfully tired. The world is a haze but your face is the clearest object I can see. I might close my eyes for a while.

ANTONIO: The world will still eventually. Let it take its time.

(Sebastian closes his eyes and time passes. Antonio stays at his side)

(Slowly, Sebastian begins to toss and turn in his sleep, crying out in a nightmare)

(Antonio takes him by the shoulders when Sebastian yells out, waking him)

ANTONIO: Roderigo. It's a dream. A night terror. There is nothing to fear.

SEBASTIAN: *(half-asleep, half-consumed by his nightmare)* Viola!

ANTONIO: Sleep. There is no danger here.

SEBASTIAN: There was a storm—

ANTONIO: I know.

SEBASTIAN: A terrible storm—

ANTONIO: Yes.

SEBASTIAN: I— the world was pitch dark; the sky was charcoal— Viola was afraid—

ANTONIO: Quiet now. The storm is over.

SEBASTIAN: It was so cold.

ANTONIO: I know.

SEBASTIAN: Viola looked so afraid.

ANTONIO: Who was Viola?

SEBASTIAN: Myself. My other half. There is nothing I am without her. Where is she?

ANTONIO: She is sleeping, as you should.

SEBASTIAN: She was ill before we left— a small cough.

ANTONIO: Lie down.

SEBASTIAN: I would fetch her lemon candies that would soothe it. Her favorite. Her favorite.

ANTONIO: *Sleep*, Roderigo. All will be at peace when morning comes. Sleep.

SEBASTIAN: Yes. Right. Sleep.

ANTONIO: Yes. It will make you well.

SEBASTIAN: Make me well...

ANTONIO: Sleep.

SEBASTIAN: I can't. When I close my eyes, I can only imagine the ink black sky when I knew that we would not make it out alive.

ANTONIO: You're alive. You lived.

SEBASTIAN: No. I can't live like this. I never will.

(Pause)

ANTONIO: Won't you tell me your real name?

SEBASTIAN: I am not that man any longer. I can't return to him.

ANTONIO: I ran from something once. But you cannot outrun the memories that chase you, they only haunt you further down the path. Ghosts are real, Roderigo, they are the things we did that we are ashamed of.

SEBASTIAN: I did nothing. I did absolutely *nothing*. I watched the mast tip into the sea— people went flying, ladies in their skirts and men in their dress shoes. I looked down into the darkness below us and I did not reach for the hands that were around me, I did not save them. I was too afraid.

ANTONIO: There are worse things.

SEBASTIAN: I am a *coward*. A coward who lived when his— when those nobler than him were ravaged by a sea crueler than the Devil himself.

ANTONIO: Better to live a coward's life than to die a hero's death, is it not?

SEBASTIAN: Is that what you truly believe? Does a Captain not go down with the ship?

ANTONIO: A braver captain, perhaps. But I became a captain by chance, a hero on fate's coattails. I am only a man, afterall. I value my life, my soul. I didn't always, but I have learned to.

SEBASTIAN: You didn't always?

ANTONIO: I was once young. Naive. I thought that I was important enough that the world hated me, that I ought to hate myself. I am unimportant, a speck of light in a world of many other specks of light. I am one star in a sky of thousands... Above this roof is the deck of the ship, and

above that is the sky. It's nearing midnight now, and the sky will be ablaze with stars. I'll take you up to see them, if you wish.

SEBASTIAN: I don't... I don't know.

ANTONIO: You do not need to punish yourself for living. There are days and days in front of you. More than you can comprehend. Days of light and days of darkness.

SEBASTIAN: I don't even know how I'm breathing. My lungs betray me with every breath; if I could stop them, I would.

ANTONIO: But you breathe regardless. You don't need to love life, you need only pass through it. Like this boat does through the waves— some days, the sea gives us a fight, making us remember our mortality. But others, there is nothing more peaceful than an ocean. You don't need to love this world, you must only be its companion.

SEBASTIAN: How do I *love* anymore... how do I even think of it without feeling *sick*?

(Pause)

ANTONIO: *(He truly speaks of himself, using the sister as a veil)* I... I had a sister once.

SEBASTIAN: You did?

ANTONIO: Yes. She was good and Godly and beautiful. She... she fell in love with a man once. She always said he was "more beautiful than the ocean", which is equal to taking the Lord's name in vain. She would have given anything for him. She would have poured her heart into every promise and changed her name to whatever he wished it to be. And... and one day, her father discovered that she had fallen in love, that she had sinned for this man. When the father sent the man away, she was so full of woe that she did not know what to do, where to put her hands, how to eat or sleep or drink.

SEBASTIAN: Did your sister ever find him again?

ANTONIO: No... she found later that he had been hung. He's dead now.

SEBASTIAN: Oh.

ANTONIO: But she did not need to find him. Her woe was not crippling. One day, she woke and the world was a little brighter. She remembered what good food tasted like. She remembered that she loved the ocean. She remembered that she was worthy.

SEBASTIAN: I see.

ANTONIO: Give yourself time. *Time*. You don't have to be anything but this mess for a while. Healing will come.

SEBASTIAN: What if it doesn't? What if I remain this way forever? Broken and sickly and different than the way I was.

ANTONIO: There is no going back to the way you were. There is only this life ahead. Anything else is lingering in the past. Grief will eat you alive, she is as unforgiving as death. Do not let her tear you asunder.

SEBASTIAN: Is grief a woman?

ANTONIO: A vicious one. Death is a wily woman with sharp canines and blood under her nails. She'll wrap her hands 'round your throat if you don't keep one eye open at night.

SEBASTIAN: Ha. I know her well.

ANTONIO: As do I.

SEBASTIAN: Who have you grieved for, Antonio?

(Pause)

ANTONIO: I mourn the life I dreamed I would live.

SEBASTIAN: Don't we all?

ANTONIO: Truly. I dreamed I would be a great man, but I forgot that I am a mortal man before I am any sort of *great*.

SEBASTIAN: God made the sea before He made man. How silly of us to think we are important.

ANTONIO: God made ants before He made man, Roderigo, perhaps His order of creation was flawed.

(Pause)

SEBASTIAN: I think I'd like to see the sky.

ANTONIO: I'll take you above board.

(Antonio helps Sebastian up and they go above board. They look up at the stars. Sebastian is awed)

SEBASTIAN: Why did I have to live? Why could I not have died and become one of those? *(He gestures to the stars)*

ANTONIO: You would have made a resplendent star. But unfortunately I think you were needed down here on the ground.

SEBASTIAN: No one needs me. Everyone who might have depended on me is dead or halfway across the continent, believing me to be at the bottom of the sea.

ANTONIO: Perhaps I needed to meet you.

(Sebastian stares at Antonio. The moment is soft. They are two men who do not know yet what they feel. They are two men destined to fall in love)

SEBASTIAN: ... Perhaps you did.

(Antonio puts his hand on Sebastian's face)

ANTONIO: Please. Tell me your name.

(Pause)

SEBASTIAN: Sebastian. My true name is Sebastian.

ANTONIO: Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN: When you say it... I'm afraid.

ANTONIO: Why?

SEBASTIAN: I don't know... you say my name like it's a prayer.

ANTONIO: I said your name exactly as I intended to.

SEBASTIAN: You cannot worship me, you hardly know me.

ANTONIO: Lesser men have worshiped lesser gods.

SEBASTIAN: That's true enough. (*Thinks for a moment*) Captain Antonio, is there room aboard your vessel to stow away a waterboarded gentleman?

ANTONIO: There might be. Does the waterboarded fellow wish to stay awhile?

SEBASTIAN: The fellow wishes to stay as long as you allow him to.

ANTONIO: That's good news. Stay, then. Stay with me.

END OF PLAY