

AFTER

a play by
Peter M. Floyd

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

PARKER, a woman in her 20s
AMY, a woman in her 20s
JEREMY, a boy, 12
OMAR, a man in his 20s
CLIVE, a man in his 30s
SUN, a woman in her 20s

Although no race or ethnicity is specified for each individual character, the cast should as a whole be a racially mixed group.

Lights up on a large kitchen. The room has the usual accouterments: sink, countertops, cabinets, refrigerator, etc., but it has a cobbled-together look about it, as if it had been assembled from elements of a number of different kitchens. At center is a table with three or four chairs. The scene is lit by a lamp that hangs overhead; its light is pallid, and is not enough to prevent the room from having a gloomy appearance. There are two doors to the kitchen: one leads to other rooms in the complex, and is used for most of the exits and entrances. The other door, on the upstage wall, leads to the outside.

On the table are two large pots holding potatoes. One of the pots holds potatoes with skins, the other pot holds peeled potatoes. AMY and PARKER sit at the table. They are both women in their early or mid-twenties. They are peeling the potatoes: taking them out of the first pot, flaying them with peelers, and placing them in the second pot. AMY is doing this briskly and efficiently, whereas PARKER performs her work in a slow, absent fashion, as if her mind is elsewhere. There is silence for about ten or fifteen seconds (aside from the sound of the peeling) before PARKER speaks.

PARKER

Do you think all morality comes from God?

AMY

Jesus, Parker, what kind of question is that?

PARKER

It's a serious question. Is God the ultimate authority on what's right and what's wrong?

AMY

Sure, I guess.

PARKER

You guess?

AMY

Well, he's the one that came up with the Ten Commandments, right? "Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie," and all that. He's basically saying, "This is what's right and what's wrong."

PARKER

Right, I know that. But what I'm asking is: Did God say that because these things are right and wrong? *Or* are they right and wrong just because God said they were?

AMY

...I'm not following.

PARKER

Well, it's like: Did God just know that some things are good and some are bad, and he passed this info on to us? Or did he have a list of all the different things people could do to each other, and go down the list saying: "Well, I'll just arbitrarily say that giving people flowers on their birthday is a *good* thing to do, and slicing their guts out with a hunting knife is a *bad* thing to do."

AMY

...You think some strange things, Parker.

PARKER

But which is it?

AMY

I have no idea. Does it matter?

PARKER

Of course it matters, Amy. I mean, if things are good and bad just because God says they are, then he could just have easily said that murder and rape are good things and love and friendship are bad things. In other words, there's nothing inherently good or evil in anything, and that's a really scary thought. But if that's not the case, if what's right and wrong are total and absolute, that means that absolute morality is something that transcends even God himself, and that's an even scarier thought.

AMY

I don't see why that would be scary.

PARKER

Because it means something is bigger than God! Something is... deeper than God! How can that be? I couldn't sleep last night thinking about this.

AMY

I think you think a little too much.

PARKER

I can't *not* think about it.

AMY

Fine. Talk to somebody, then. Somebody who isn't me. And peel a little faster; I'm doing all the work here.

PARKER

I'm not good at this.

AMY

That 'cause you don't concentrate on what you're doing. I can peel five of these while you're doing just one.

PARKER

Kitchen work doesn't suit me. I'd be much better as a hunter, I know it.

AMY

Women don't hunt. Women cook. Men hunt.

PARKER

It wasn't like that Before. Used to be, people could do whatever they wanted to.

AMY

That was Before, wasn't it?

JEREMY enters. He is about twelve.

JEREMY

Hey, Amy. Hey, Parker.

AMY

Hey, Jeremy!

PARKER

Hey.

AMY

What's up?

JEREMY

Just got back from the hunt.

AMY

Yeah? They took you on the hunt this time?

JEREMY

Clive said I was old enough.

PARKER

How was it?

JEREMY

Pretty cool. We checked some snares, and turns out we caught a couple of rabbits. We saw a deer, but it got away before we could get it.

AMY

Uh-huh.

PARKER

Did you like being out in the woods?

JEREMY

Sure. Well, actually, it was a little scary, but I figured I was with Clive and Bobby, so I'd be okay.

PARKER

Did you see the Ghost Man?

AMY

Parker!

JEREMY

No.

AMY

Of course not. There's no such thing.

JEREMY

There is, too. Bobby says so. He says he's seen it.

AMY

Sure he has.

JEREMY

He says he's seen the Ghost Man three times, the last time it wasn't more than fifteen yards away from him.

AMY

Bobby says a lot of things.

PARKER

It's not just Bobby. Patel's seen him, too.

AMY

Of course, anything that Bobby says, Patel will swear to. Has Clive ever said he's seen it?

JEREMY

No.

AMY

No. 'Cause Clive isn't a bullshit artist. Now, Jeremy, did you have an actual reason for coming in here, or did you just want to brag about being in on the hunt?

JEREMY

Just wanted to tell you about the rabbits. Sandy's cleaning 'em and will bring 'em in later.

AMY

Great, thanks. Oh, and if you want a cookie before you go, you can go ahead.

JEREMY

Well, I don't really--

AMY

Don't give me any of that "too old for cookies" crap.

JEREMY

Okay.

JEREMY goes to a jar sitting on the counter, opens it, and takes out a cookie. He starts munching on it as he moves to the exit.

JEREMY

Bye.

AMY

Bye, Jeremy.

PARKER

Bye, now.

JEREMY leaves.

PARKER

He's got such a crush on you.

AMY

He's a little young, even for me.

PARKER

It's kind of cute.

AMY

Why were going on about that Ghost Man crap? You don't believe that shit, do you?

PARKER

Why not?

AMY

There aren't any ghosts or monsters out there. That's not the way the world works.

PARKER

How do you know how the world works? You haven't been out there.

AMY

I know that the world has certain rules. Laws of nature, you know. It's science.

PARKER

Fifteen years ago, almost everybody in the world vanished just like *that*. (*She snaps her fingers.*) If that can happen, then a Ghost Man can happen.

AMY

It's not the same thing.

PARKER

I never said it was the same thing. I just mean that if you can believe that ten billion people can just disappear, then why not believe there could be a Ghost Man?

OMAR enters. He is about AMY and PARKER's age, and is a nervous and excitable man. He carries a very old radio.

OMAR

Hey, listen to this!

PARKER

Hey, Omar.

OMAR

You have to hear this!

AMY

What? Don't tell me you finally fixed that stupid radio?

OMAR

I didn't have to fix it, it was never broken. There was just nothing for it to pick up. Not until now!

PARKER

You found something!

OMAR (laughing almost hysterically)

I did!

PARKER

Well, come on! Let's hear it!

OMAR sets the radio down and turns it on. A burst of static comes out. He begins to move the tuner dial, and all at once the static cuts out, and a deep voice emerges from the radio. The three listen to it, rapt.

VOICE

...is Riga. The capital of Lebanon is Beirut. The capital of Lesotho is Maseru. The capital of Liberia is Monrovia. The capital of Libya is Tripoli. The capital of Lichtenstein is Vaduz. The capital of Lithuania is Vilnius. The capital of Luxembourg is...

AMY

Who do you think it is?

OMAR

I don't know.

PARKER

Can you tell where it's coming from?

OMAR

Not really, no.

VOICE

The capital of Macau is Macao. The capital of Macedonia is Skopje. The capital of Madagascar is Antananarivo. The capital of Malawi is...

AMY

Is that all he talks about? The old capitals?

OMAR

No. When I first heard him, he was listing the names of the Nobel Prize winners in Economics.

AMY

He must have a book or something in front of him. No way could he have memorized all this.

PARKER

But why talk about that at all? Why not say, "Hello, I'm alive! Here's where I am, come find me!" I mean, there aren't any countries any more; who cares what the capitals used to be?

AMY

Could you send a signal back to him? Let him know that we're hearing him?

OMAR

Not with the equipment I have. I'd need some kind of transmitter.

AMY

Can't you build one?

OMAR

...I don't know how. And even if I did, I don't think I'd have the proper parts.

VOICE

...of Mauritania is Nouakchott. The capital of Mauritius is Port Louis. The capital of Mayotte is Mamoudzou. The capital of Mexico is Mexico City. The capital of Micronesia is...

AMY

This is boring. It's the first time we've ever heard from someone else, and it's boring!

PARKER

Maybe he's trying to preserve these pieces of information from Before, so we don't forget it.

AMY

Then just write it down; you don't need to shout it into the sky.

OMAR

It might even be a recording. Something from Before that's just getting broadcast.

PARKER

But who'd be broadcasting it, then?

OMAR

I don't know. I'm going to go tell Clive.

He exits with the radio.

AMY

Why did he tell us before he told Clive?

PARKER

'Cause he's got a crush on you.

AMY

Parker, not everybody has a crush on me.

PARKER

Pretty much everybody.

AMY

Not Clive.

PARKER

Clive's gay.

AMY

Exactly.

PARKER

Okay. Here's an axiom: All straight men have a crush on Amy. Clive is gay. Therefore, Clive does not have a crush on Amy. I think that's a fallacy...

AMY

Parker, this is getting boring.

PARKER

It's more interesting than someone naming the capitals of the world.

AMY

There are still potatoes to peel.

PARKER

Peeling potatoes is the most boring thing of all.

AMY

I know, but it has to be done.

PARKER

Why? Some people like to have skins on their potatoes.

AMY

But not everybody.

PARKER

So, we peel half the potatoes. The rest we give to those who--

AMY

Parker, just shut up and keep peeling. We'd be done by now if you weren't always talking.

PARKER

But I--

AMY

Uh uh! Don't talk. No more conversation until every spud is skinless.

PARKER

Okay.

AMY

Not even an "okay"! Just peel.

PARKER nods and starts peeling. She attempts to be diligent, but soon loses interest and lets her mind wander. There is the sound of light footsteps outside the upstage door. She looks up at it, just a shadow can be seen crossing behind it, as if someone were moving past it. PARKER leaps to her feet and runs to the door. She pulls it open, and looks about vainly.

AMY

What the hell are you doing?

PARKER mimes her recent actions: Seeing something move, running over the door, opening it, and looking out.

AMY

What?

PARKER repeats her mimes, more slowly and deliberately.

AMY

Jesus God, Parker, you make me want to strangle you sometimes. Just tell me.

PARKER

I can talk now?

AMY

Yes, until I begin the strangulation.

PARKER

I saw someone move past this door, and I went to look outside to see who it was, but nobody was there.

AMY

It could have been anyone. It's no big deal.

PARKER

But how did they disappear when I opened the door?

AMY

I don't know. They just went around the corner or something.

PARKER

There aren't any corners there!

AMY

You probably just imagined it.

PARKER

I did not! You want to know who I think it was?

AMY

If you tell me that you think it was the Ghost Man I will brain you with a frying pan.

PARKER

I think it was the Ghost Man!

AMY

Oh, Christ.

PARKER

It could have been.

AMY

No, it couldn't.

PARKER

Why do you say that?

AMY

'Cause I told you, there's no such thing.

PARKER

You don't know that.

AMY

Do you want proof?

PARKER

Yes.

AMY

Who has seen the Ghost Man? Bobby and Patel.

PARKER

Right.

AMY

Are Bobby and Patel ever right about anything?

PARKER

Sometimes.

AMY

Really?

PARKER

No.

AMY

All right. So it's proven: Ghost Man does not exist.

PARKER

Okay, fine. *(Beat.)* Don't you wish he did though?

Lights go down. Lights rise again on JEREMY, who is reading from a paper he has written. He is very nervous, and stumbles over his words as he speaks.

JEREMY

"What Happened Before" by Jeremy Robbins. Once, there were lots of people in the world, over ten billion of them. Now there are only forty-eight, at least that we know of. About fifteen years ago, everybody else just disappeared. Nobody

knows why. Some people say that God called all these people up to Heaven, and the ones left behind were those who didn't deserve to go there. Some people say that aliens from other planets came and took everyone away, except a few that got forgotten. A few people say that the Earth got tired of the weight of the human race, and just swallowed people up until there were too few left to be a problem. There's also a theory that the world got split into a hundred million worlds, and each of those worlds has only forty-eight people, and each world thinks that they're the only one. We don't really know. I wasn't there when this happened, but I was the first baby born afterwards. Since then, we've had five more babies: Ellen Castanera, George Perez, Mikey Castanera, David LaBonte, and Janie Chin. Clive says that we in the new generation will have to repopulate the Earth. I hope I don't have to do that, because then I'd have to pair up with either Janie, who is too young for me, or Ellen, who is mean. I wish I lived in the Before times, when there were things like airplanes you could fly around in, and computers you could play games on. I do like going on hunts and swimming in the Deep Lake. I wish there were more people around, especially girls my age who aren't mean. That's all.

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