

Tempest

Productions

JOURNEY TO THE GOLDEN PEOPLE

By Bibi Berki

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07941 154866

www.tempestproductions.net

THE SLEEPER

Characters

Man

Woman

Nurse/doctor

SCENE 1

[Interior train sound throughout.]

Man

[Coughs.]

Sorry.

Do you mind if I sit next to you?

[Pause]

I said, do you mind if I sit here?

[Pause]

Ah. You *do* mind.

Woman

There are so many empty seats in this carriage. Why next to me?

Man

Well now, you don't own it, do you? This seat, I mean. Is it your own personal seat?

Woman

No, I don't own it.

Man

Then I'll take it.

[Pause]

Lovely.

Fabulous.

Like you, I have a preference for these two seats over the other ones.

Woman

I didn't say I preferred it. I just happen to be sitting here.

Man

Oh come on! You could have sat anywhere but you chose this one.

Woman

[Sighs loudly]

Man

Sorry.

I'll shut up.

I have a tendency to go on a bit. Possibly annoying. I don't know.

[Pause]

Do you mind if I eat something?

Woman

No, I don't mind if you eat something.

Man

[Unpacking things.]

Ah, the joys of eating on a train.

There's something about trains and eating, don't you think?

Woman

I'm not aware of it.

Man

For me there is. Sense of holiday. Of indulgence. The adventure's just beginning. I bloody love it. Twix?

Woman

I'm sorry?

Man

The beauty of a Twix - you can share it. Want one? Here you go.

Woman

I really don't...

Man

Still leaves me with what many people would consider a sizeable chocolate bar in its own right. And yet here I am with two of them, one for each of us. In many ways it's an ice-breaker, *the* ice-breaker of all chocolate bars. I mean you couldn't start up a conversation by offering someone half a finger of Fudge. It would be shameful.

Woman

Look... Can you...? Will you please stop waving that Twix in my face!

Man

Sorry. Sorry. I'll put them away. Actually, I'd rather start with crisps. That makes more sense, doesn't it?

Woman

Does it?

Man

Well it's the main course. Carb heavy, I'll grant you. Think about it, if they include it in a meal deal, then, technically, it's got to count as a lunchtime item. Want some?

Woman

No thank you.

Man

Hold on, I've got other flavours you might prefer. Any of these do it for you? Oh and I nearly forgot... mini pork pies. Oh and Maltesers. **[Very precise, like a revelation]** You like those.

Woman

My God, have you got an entire picnic in there?

Man

No, no Picnics. Always preferred a Lion Bar.

Woman

[She lets out a small laugh, despite herself.]

Man

I'll... err... put it all away, shall I? Hold on. Back into the bag, with you all. In you go, Scotch eggs. You're not wanted here. Pepperami - be gone!

[Pause]

The last thing I want is to irritate you.

Woman

Then...

Man

Then what? Go away? You're going to ask me to get lost, aren't you? But I've settled down now and the thing is, I prefer these seats, so it would be a shame to send me packing. But if that's what you really want. Just say it. Go on.

Woman

You don't have to go away. I couldn't make you even if I wanted

to. And you couldn't irritate me, by the way. However hard you tried.

Man

Good. That's good.

Woman

You don't even have to shut up.

Man

Also good.

Woman

Because I'm not listening to you.

Man

Ah.

Woman

My ears are not trained on your voice. You're already disappearing.

Man

Disappearing?

Woman

Virtually gone.

[Long pause. General train sounds]

Man

Sorry, I just wanted to ask...

Woman

[Dreamily]

What?

Man

I just wondered what you're listening to?

Woman

What did you say?

Man

You said your ears were not trained on my voice. What are they trained on?

Woman

[Amused] *Trained.* I never thought of that. **[Suddenly concerned]** Listen, does this sound strange to you? I'm not thinking about much at all. Now and again something - an image - emerges and I try and focus on it, but I can't seem to be able to. And also there's this: there are things outside but I can't quite see them. Can you? Can you see what on earth is out there?

Man

They're going past at speed, that's all.

Woman

Is that it, do you think?

Man

I think it might be. I think you might need to get off the train, perhaps. At the next stop.

Woman

Are you out of your mind? Why would I?

Man

It was just a thought.

[Long pause again]

Woman

I'm staying right here.

Man

Alright.

Woman

I'll tell you what I'm listening to. The train. Just the train. I'm tuned into it now and I can't bear the thought of it stopping.

Man

It stops to let people off.

Woman

No, it doesn't. That's the funny thing. I think it slows now and again but I don't remember it stopping. Do you think it's odd, what I'm telling you?

Man

No, I don't, actually. I'm glad you noticed it too.

Woman

So you know something? You work here?

Man

Not exactly, no. I do work though.

Woman

Well that's something reassuringly normal about you.

Man

I'll tell you what, here's a diverting kind of game. Why don't you tell me what you see when you look at me?

Woman

I'd rather not. How on earth is that a *diverting kind of game*?

Man

What? You can't drag yourself away from that window long enough to give me a once over? Come on. You know you want to. Just give it a little try. What do you see?

Woman

I dunno, a man, I suppose.

Man

And that's it?

Woman

I'm not going any further with this.

Man

Don't I look different to you? Different from the other people in this train? Come on, look at me again.

Woman

Can you stop it. I think it's time you got another seat.

Man

[Urgently, like he's suddenly breaking cover] Get off the train now. You have to get off. Do it now.

Woman

Stop it! What are you talking about? What is it to you whether I get off at the next stop or stay on it for...

Man

Forever?

Woman

You're not normal. You say bizarre things like that. You're like a person in a dream. You're so strange, I'm not even sure you're real.

Man

Well maybe I'm not.

Woman

Go away. I'll call the guard.

Man

Go ahead.

Woman

I will. I'll call him right now. I mean it.

Man

When did you last see the guard? Or a conductor? Or anyone in charge? Go on, tell me. Describe him. Or maybe he's in another carriage? Is that right? He's in the other carriage? Is that where your children are? Your husband?

Woman

What? What are you talking about? Why did you use the word *children*? I've not mentioned children. Why have you said that?

Man

I just wondered where your family was.

Woman

I didn't say anything about a family. You're just trying to guess

things about me - you're trying to unsettle me. And I don't know why you're doing it. I think - I *feel* - that I ought to work out who you are, in case you're a danger to me.

Man

Well, while we're on the subject of danger...

Woman

Don't. I don't want to hear it. You've said enough.

[Pause]

Man

I just thought you were about the right age to have had children. You have that look about you. A mother. Really, you do.

Woman

Oh please. People don't look like mothers or fathers. They just look like themselves.

Man

Can you see yourself as a mother?

Woman

I'm looking out of the window at the moment. So I'm not answering that.

Man

[Leaning over and talking to another passenger quite a distance away.]

Excuse me. Hello! Just wondered if you could help me out. Does she look like a mother to you?

Woman

Don't! Stop it.

Man

Hello!

Woman

I said stop it.

Man

He can't hear me. He's asleep. I could try that woman over there.

Woman

I really insist that you stop this.

Man

It's alright. Calm down. Haven't you noticed? They're all asleep. Every single one of them.

Woman

Well lucky them. I was nearly asleep before you disturbed me. You might be weird and prefer eating, but *normal* people feel drowsy on trains. It's just the sound that does it. It's like your own blood rushing along. It becomes part of you, the rhythm of your heart. I've come so close to falling asleep on here.

Man

[Forcefully]

Don't!

Woman

Why shouldn't I?

Man

[Much more lightly.]

You'll miss your stop.

Woman

I'm sure I won't. People seem to know when to get off. Commuters, drunks, exhausted workers. They always know when to wake up, don't they? They've been using the train so long that they have an inbuilt alarm call when they reach their stop.

Man

I've never fallen asleep on a train.

Woman

Surprise, surprise. Maybe you're too tense. Or too weird. You're too weird to do anything the same as everyone else. You're not like these other people.

Man

Maybe you're right.

Maybe I'm not.

In fact, I might as well tell you. It's official: I am *not* like these other people.

Shall I tell you what I am?

Woman

Do I want to know? Do I *need* to know?

Man

Yes you do. I have a role assigned to me. My job is...

Woman

Do I care?

Man

My job, if you really want to know...

Woman

I don't.

Man

My job is to fetch people. People like you.

Woman

People like me?

Man

Yes. I retrieve them. They're in the wrong place.

Woman

I think I've tried to tell you that there is no righter place than this for me. It feels right and it smells right. There's such a beautiful, sunny, warm smell in my nostrils. I can't bring myself to move from these seats. That means it must be right.

Man

You shouldn't think that.

Woman

I want to ask you where you're from, but I don't think I could picture it, even if you told me.

Man

You could if you tried.

Listen, please, just stop for a minute and look at me.

Woman

I do like Maltesers though. You're right. How do you know that? How do you know things? You've only just got on. Strangers shouldn't profess to know things about a person. It's -

Man

[Emotion is welling up in him]

Stop, shh. Stop. Just look at me. There is no light on this train

but the light that's coming from you. You illuminate the world around you. You do it with your smile and your gentle grey eyes. It comes off your cheeks and your hair. Yes... you love Maltesers and so do I. So do I! There's so much that you know about love.

Woman

[Seemingly unmoved]

Every now and again I catch a word in an announcement, the name of a stop, and I try and imagine it but I find I can't. I probably never went to these places. You know why it is, don't you?

Man

[Crestfallen.]

No, tell me.

Woman

Because I'm not meant to get off at any of them. There's no internal alarm call. Or at least I haven't heard it yet. Isn't it strange, travelling all this distance and not actually remembering where you're going. I wonder how it can be, that I don't know.

Man

Perhaps you're too busy listening to the bloody train and dropping off.

Woman

It's more than just listening. That's what I'm trying to tell you. It's breathing, it's functioning, it's my pulse, it's my thought patterns. It lulls me. It's probably just like being in a womb.

Man

And you don't have a problem with that?

Woman

I don't. No. I'm surprised you have.

Man

It's my job to point it out to you that you should get off at the next stop.

Woman

What? Your proper, paid job? You sit next to strangers and you usher them off trains?

Man

You. It's you I was sent to sit next to.

Woman

Who on earth sent you? And why not pick on one of the others in the carriage?

Man

They don't concern me.

Woman

You're making me uncomfortable.

Man

Good. That's the idea. Look at me again? Do I look right to you? Do I look like I belong here?

Woman

You... you don't look like you belong in this world.

Man

This world? Then what world do I come from? Come on. Wake up. Stop looking out of the bloody window. Concentrate on me.

Woman

You're from a different world?

Man

Am I? You're the one who says it.

Woman

What do you want with me?

Man

Where I come from people look after each other. It's a kind of social necessity. It keeps the species ticking over. Where I come from, they make promises and would travel the universe to stick to those promises.

Woman

[Confused, drifting]

Travel the universe?

Man

Yes, yes they would. They'd go anywhere, do anything, to stick to a vow. That's what keeps them ticking over.

Woman

Ticking over...

Man

I've been sent here. You're going to have to trust me. You're in danger. It's too late for these others. You have to get off at the next stop.

Woman

[Still vague, still trying to place something.]

You'd travel the universe? You'd bypass other planets?

Man

[Excited]

Yes! Yes, I would. That's right. Remember that. I'm here to help you. And remember something else, too.

Woman

What?

Man

[Pronouncing it slowly and precisely]

They look like they're made of gold.

Woman

Your people?

Man

Yes, my people.

Woman

They look like they're made of gold.

Man

Picture them. Come on. Think of people made of gold.

Woman

I'm trying.

Man

Beautiful, pure people, warm as the sun. Think of them. Just think of them.

Woman

I... I can't. But I want to. I do, please believe me. But I can't quite.

Wait. Listen. Have you noticed? Oh my God, haven't you noticed?
Are you behind this? Did you do this?

Man

What?

Woman

The train. It's stopped. Have you stopped the train?

Man

You're right. It's only bloody gone and stopped.

Woman

Oh my God, no.

Man

This is it! This is our moment. Look lively. This is where we get
off.

SCENE 2

[They are moving through the compartment. There is silence, a
muffled, airless interior. He is in charge. She is following.]

Man

Ignore them. They're asleep. Just follow me.

Woman

But they might be missing their stops.

Man

How many times do I have to tell you? They're not getting off.

Not ever. This train isn't what you think it is.

Woman

What? What is it then? What do you know? You say you've been sent here from somewhere else and you expect me to swallow that. How do I know you're not taking me somewhere worse? I don't have to simply comply. I'm a free agent, you know.

Man

[Heaving open a door separating two compartments]

Go on. Get in there.

Woman

I hate those connecting compartments. I don't like going in them.

Man

Get in.

Woman

They're not for passenger use. They're just storage. They're always empty and dark. There's no point to them. People should not be in there.

Man

[Impatient]

Get. In.

Woman

Now I'm seeing you for what you are. You're not at all pleasant.

Man

I'm perfectly pleasant. I'm just doing my job. I'm the backbone of this outfit. Remember that. Now wait there. And when I say now, you jump. Do you hear me? You don't stop to think about it, you don't question. You jump.

[Door is suddenly flung open. We hear the air whistling outside.]

Right, jump. Now. Go on, what are you waiting for. Jump!

Woman

What's out there? I can't see anything.

Man

Why do you need to see anything? Why must you prevaricate?

Woman

Why are you so different all of a sudden? I don't know what to think about you. For a moment, I believed you when you said you wanted to help me.

Man

What? Why are you thinking those things now? We've been through all this. For God's sake jump now, while the door is open.

Woman

It's only open because you opened it.

Man

Why are you moving back? Stop right there.
Please. Please just wait a moment. Think about it. Think of all the things you'll see when you leave this train.

Woman

The golden people?

Man

Oh God yes, yes! Those beautiful golden people. Don't you want to see them? And kittens!

Woman

Kittens?

Man

Yes, everyone likes a kitten, don't they?

Woman

What on earth are you talking about? Kittens!

Man

Alright, there might not be any kittens, but the rest is all true. You'll see those people. Oh for Goodness' sake - I'm begging you. Just shut up and jump.

Woman

It's you. You're the problem. You confuse me. You say you were sent but you won't say where from. You say it's a different world and you expect me to believe you. You're asking me to leap into the cold and the dark and you try and entice me away from what is warm and comfortable and safe.

Man

What's so frightening about the cold and the dark? The universe is cold and dark.

Woman

And you claim to have travelled it.

Man

[Almost in tears]

I told you I would, and I will.

Woman

But why? Why did you? Who am I to you? Nothing!

[Long, tense pause]

[Creak as train is starting to move off.]

Man

Oh no. Oh God, no. We're moving.

Woman

I think there's a reason no one else wanted to get off. They're happily asleep. It's not worth their waking up. Can't I just go back and join them? I want to sleep.

Man

[Frantic]

No! No, don't say that.

Woman

Let's go back to our seats. You liked those seats, too, didn't you? I crave them. We can have those crisps. What do you say? Stay with me.

Man

I'm telling you to jump now. There's still time.

Woman

But we're moving.

Man

It's still slow. Come on.

Woman

It's not going too fast?

Man

No, it's not too fast at all. You can do it easily. It's a

doddle. Anyone could jump now.

Woman

Will you jump too?

Man

Look at me now, please. Just look at me. That's it, that's it.
Can't you see that I'm with you, that I'd never leave you. Can't
you see that? Aren't you reassured by these?

Woman

These?

These tears! You're crying.

Man

I've travelled the universe.

Woman

Why are you crying?

Man

Because you won't jump. You won't jump.

Woman

I daren't! It's picking up speed.

Man

There's still time. You have to do this.

Woman

Then jump first, so that I know it's alright.

Man

I don't have to. This is your turn. You have to do it. I'm
already safe.

Woman

Please, oh please. I daren't. Show me the way.

Man

[Very tearful now] Can I kiss you?

Woman

Show me the way.

Man

Just one kiss.

Woman

Here, here. Happy? But hurry.

Man

Thank you.

Thank you.

You must promise to follow me.

[He jumps]

[Sound of train getting louder, as is the rush of air going past the open door. Building to a crescendo. We hear his voice very distantly]

You must follow me.

Woman

[Whispered.]

I'm sorry.

I'm so sorry.

SCENE 3

[The air keeps swirling and eventually subsides and we are indoors, in a clinical situation. We can hear the general hubbub of a hospital and the clicks and beeps of a high dependency unit.]

Doctor

I'm sorry.

I'm so very sorry.

She's not going to wake. I know it looked like she might for a while.

Man

[Barely holding it together.]

I was sure...

Doctor

I know.

Man

You said there was a chance.

Doctor

There's always a chance but the specialist said last night that the chance has probably passed. Think of her as being asleep, on a perpetual journey. She can't wake up. But she's comfortable. She's in a familiar place. She's not afraid or in pain. The journey will just keep on going.

Man

[In anguish] She's not a fighter. That's the thing. She just lets life happen to her. She's the easiest person in the world. That's

what made me always want to look after her.

Doctor

I know.

Man

You don't know!

Doctor

Sometimes fighting doesn't help. It just prolongs everyone's pain. Maybe she knew that. Maybe she just wanted to make things a bit easier for all of you.

Man

I told her when we had our first child that I'd do anything to protect them, to look after all of them. I thought I could. I told her I'd find a way to cross the universe if one of them was in trouble. You know what she called me?

Doctor

Go on.

Man

She said I was the backbone of the outfit.

Doctor

That's a nice thing to be. It's important.

Man

I was always pushing, fighting, insisting. I was often angry and a bully. And she wasn't any of those things. "As long as we're ticking over," she said.

[Low level sound of a couple talking and gently laughing is heard behind following lines.]

Just as long as we were ticking over as a family, then everything will be fine. She thought everything had its rhythm, even a growing family. I never understood. It needed caring for, this unit of ours. It needed protecting. And I was the protector. That was my job, to keep us together. It was my role to keep us gathered in and stuck together.

[We are at home, as things used to be. The TV/radio is on in the background.]

Woman

My God, look at them. Just look.

Man

They're so beautiful when they're asleep.

Woman

[In a state of wonder.]

They're like golden people.

Man

Yes. I suppose they are. They do seem to bit burnished right now, don't they? In fact, they're more like a basket of ginger kittens.

Woman

I love it!

Man

Only more of a handful.

Woman

You know I could climb in there between them and just nestle down and sleep forever. Actually, wouldn't that be the perfect end?

Just the smell of them, the feel of them against me. I can't think of a better way to go than with their golden, warm smell in my nostrils.

Man

Err let's not talk about things like that, shall we?

Woman

Whatever you say. You're the boss.

Man

I just hate you even thinking about this ever ending. I can't bear it. What is it about you and saying stuff like that?

Woman

I know. I'm sorry. I know you never want it to end. But I don't think like that. I don't let myself worry. It's now that counts. It's always now. Just give in to it. You can't control the rest.

Man

I bloody can.

Woman

OK, OK. Whatever you say. You're in charge. I'm happy with that. You just watch over all of us. All the time. I give in.

Man

Good.

Woman

Fine.

Man

Alright then.

Woman

Sorted.

Now you've woken them up.

Man

I've woken them up!

Woman

Shush!

Man

Here we go. Thought it was too good to last.

[Child's sleepy voice mumbles 'Mummy', all fades.]

Woman

Aww hello you. You want a cuddle? OK. Come on... let's all go back to sleep together. That's it, sweetheart... close your eyes...

[ENDS]