

The Peculiar Ways We Go About Coping

CHARACTERS

DOROTHY FLETCHER, a worn-down wife with an acclimation towards poetry, mid thirties

CAIN FLETCHER, Dorothy's overbearing abusive husband, mid-thirties

Spotlight on DOROTHY FLETCHER (30s) standing center stage. She wears a simple and worn down dress, and has an overall feeling of tiredness. When she speaks, the whole world seems to listen. She holds a notebook.

DOROTHY: I am an artist at heart
 Living and breathing with the pain of my mother
 Surviving on the spilled tears of my brother
 Tormented by the grief that tears me apart

When the seasons pass so do I
 When the man comes home and I hear him yell
 And he does things I'm not allowed to tell
 I watch my hopes and ambitions die

Dear mother, I'm sorry. You expected better
 But the man I married is like his father
 To him I am nothing but a face and a washer
 To my prayers I am an unpaying debtor

So mother if you can hear me now
 Please excuse my quiet submission
 My guilt is a home that I live in
 And I would escape it if I only knew how

A loud and bold knock on the door startles Dorothy out of her writing as the lights on the rest of the stage come up. There is a simple red couch with a couple worn down pillows, and on the other side of the stage a small table with a couple of chairs and a cabinet behind it.

Dorothy, startled, drops her notebook on the couch and runs to open the door for CAIN FLETCHER (30s). He wears an old flannel and has dirt all over him. He walks to take up space, brushing past Dorothy as he heads towards the kitchen.

DOROTHY: How was work today?

CAIN: Fine. Had some girl come in with another blown tire. You'd think she'd just stop drivin' by now.

DOROTHY: And how's the new guy?

CAIN: Incompetent to say the least.

As he speaks, Cain looks through the cabinet until he finds a bottle of alcohol. He puts something on the table.

DOROTHY: *(noticing the thing on the table)* What's that?

CAIN: *(looks back briefly, finds alcohol)* A gun.

DOROTHY: Where'd you get it?

CAIN: Does it matter? *(takes a drink)* Had to tell the new guy at least six times to document what he was doing for customers. *(takes another drink and sighs)*. It was exhausting.

DOROTHY: ...I'm sorry. That must have been hard.

CAIN: You're telling me.

Cain walks over to the couch and picks up the notebook.

CAIN: *(holding it up, tone completely changed)* What's this?

DOROTHY: *(tries to grab it and fails)*. Nothing— I'm sorry I shouldn't have left it out.

CAIN: Are you writing that poetry stuff again?

DOROTHY: I must have just left it out—

CAIN: *(reading from the page)* “Tormented by the grief that tears me apart” What’s that mean?

DOROTHY: It’s nothing.... I’m sorry.

CAIN: *(closes book and sits down on the couch)* I don’t see why you like that stuff so much anyway.

DOROTHY: You had a good day though?

CAIN: Don’t change the subject... *(shifts on the couch, getting comfortable)*. Write me something.

DOROTHY: Write you—

CAIN: Some of that poetry stuff. It’s gotta be good for something.

Dorothy moves to get the notebook from the couch but Cain moves it away as she speaks.

DOROTHY: I can try to work on— you mean right now?

CAIN: You’d rather keep me waiting? Go ahead. Write something pretty. Like... compare me to a flower. A manly one.

DOROTHY: Right...

Dorothy clears her throat awkwardly as she moves back to center stage, glancing back at Cain every once and a while as he watches, still holding a bottle in his hand.

DOROTHY: I... have never known such a manly flower...

Dorothy pauses, looking back to Cain who only motions for her to continue.

DOROTHY: ...With petals blooming from ...a morning shower—

CAIN: Are you saying I stink?

DOROTHY: No no that’s not what I—

Cain scoffs and stands up, setting his bottle on the table.

CAIN: Forget I asked. Pathetic.

DOROTHY: Maybe if you would let me prepare something bef—

CAIN: *(points his hand in her face aggressively)* Don't you dare use that tone with me.

Cain takes off his flannel with a plain wife beater underneath. He shoves the flannel at her chest and she takes it instinctually.

CAIN: Wash this for me would you?

Dorothy stays frozen as Cain exits, grabbing the bottle on the table on his way out. Dorothy is left alone on the stage, still holding the flannel.

DOROTHY: How can simple plaid be so threatening?

How can I die from just the stitching?

How can a husband be so cruel and mean?

How can a wife remain silent and serene?

How can a poet write without a prompt?

How can she write love without a want?

How can I stay here without a fight?

How can I defeat another sleepless night?

Dorothy sighs and puts the flannel over a chair by the table.

Cain enters from behind Dorothy and hugs her. She's surprised. He's wearing a different outfit.

CAIN: How are you today baby?

DOROTHY: *(smiles)* You're in a good mood.

CAIN: How could I not be with you right in front of me?

Dorothy smiles as Cain leads her over to the couch.

DOROTHY: Did you have a good day at work?

CAIN: The new guy's getting better.

DOROTHY: Oh yeah?

CAIN: All thanks to my training of course.... *(looks her up and down)* You're beautiful.

Dorothy looks down shyly. Cain pushes her hair behind her ears and runs his hand along her clothes.

CAIN: Have I ever told you how much I love this dress on you?

DOROTHY: This would be the first time...

Cain stares at Dorothy for a moment longer, then pulls her into a kiss, moving with her in an odd mix between passionate and aggressive. She pulls away for a moment.

DOROTHY: I've been thinking—

CAIN: Think later.

They kiss for a while.

DOROTHY: Cain—

CAIN: Just trust me baby-

They kiss for a moment, then Dorothy strictly pulls away.

DOROTHY: Anna asked me to read one of my poems at her poetry night.

They freeze. Cain stares at her for a moment as his desperate posture slowly shifts to one of anger.

CAIN: I told you a long time ago to stop with this poetry thing.

DOROTHY: But I'm *good* at it.

CAIN: You're fooling yourself. If you're good at anything it's disobeying me.

Dorothy stands up and backs away from him.

DOROTHY: I'm your wife. Not your servant.

CAIN: You think I don't know that?

DOROTHY: You don't act like it.

CAIN: *(standing up)* What do you expect me to act like Dorothy? I'm trying to protect you here. Have you ever met a poet who hasn't wanted to kill himself?

DOROTHY: I don't want to *kill* myself.

CAIN: You act like it— Moping around all day looking sad never changing your clothes—

DOROTHY: Two minutes ago you loved this dress.

Cain pushes past her.

CAIN: I can't have this conversation with you right now. You're being unreasonable.

DOROTHY: Don't walk away from me—

CAIN: Compose yourself would you?

DOROTHY: *(grabbing Cain's hand to stop him)* Cain please—

Cain slaps her.

And Dorothy stares at him.

CAIN: Well?

Dorothy hesitates for a long time.

She eyes the gun on the table.

Then she looks back at Cain.

DOROTHY: I'll tell Anna I can't do her poetry reading.

Cain exits.

Dorothy watches him, then slowly back up into the spotlight on center stage.

She takes a few deep breaths as slowly her situation begins to sink in. Truly. For what feels like the first time.

DOROTHY: What is humanity but an amalgamation of our pain?

What life do we possess outside of it?

Even the plants outside and considered beautiful when they wither and die

But why have I finally had enough of it?

Why is my long lost content so foreign now?

Why is my obedience so forgotten?

Why do I bear his name as he holds me down with his reigns

While my thoughts are growing rotten.

Why do I hate the man to whom I've written vows?

Who used to know my every secret

But now his words are cruel and his mannerisms adding more fuel

To the woman who asked him to keep it

But contentedness is not the path for me

Submission has become too much to bear

And when he returns to fight and show me he truly is right

He will see me. And who's truly there.

Dorothy grabs her notebook and holds it tightly in her hand. Cain enters, wearing a different outfit.

Dorothy won't look at him, and she responds with strength, posture and demeanor transformed.

CAIN: You were supposed to pick me up today.

DOROTHY: I was busy.

CAIN: *(not expecting her tone)* Busy doing what?

DOROTHY: *(holding up her notebook)* What do you think?

CAIN: First you disobey me then you provoke me?

DOROTHY: Is it working?

CAIN: I don't know why you're acting like this all of a sudden. You used to be so kind. So loving.

What changed Dorothy? Who is this new person?

DOROTHY: What about this new person bothers you so much?

CAIN: What about her *doesn't* bother me? You don't listen to me, you undermine my authority, you're suicidal and manipulative—

DOROTHY: *I'm* manipulative? Are you serious?

Cain pauses for a long time.

CAIN: What's that supposed to mean?

DOROTHY: What the hell do you think it means?

CAIN: My mother was right. I never should've married you. You were good for a night and no more.

DOROTHY: Is that right?

CAIN: You're lucky I'm feeling patient today or Dorothy I swear to God—

DOROTHY: I'm so grateful.

CAIN: Dorothy—

DOROTHY: For the love of God Cain! Listen to yourself! Do you hear what you're saying? How you've been treating me? And somehow *I'm* the problem.

CAIN: Don't make this my fault—

DOROTHY: It is your fault Cain! It is your fault.

Dorothy freezes. She shouldn't say it, but somehow, she does.

DOROTHY: You're just like your dad.

Cain tackles Dorothy to the ground, pinning her down. They're both hysterical.

CAIN: Do *not* compare me to him. Don't you ever dare you—

DOROTHY: Cain stop that hurts—

Dorothy grabs the gun sitting on the table as she scrambles away from Cain for a moment. But he tries to take it from her and soon they're fighting over the gun.

DOROTHY: Let go of me!

CAIN: Are you trying to shoot me? Is that it?

They fight.

DOROTHY: Cain stop!

CAIN: Dorothy—

They fight and yell at each other until—

BANG.

The gun goes off.

And silence follows.

Until we see Dorothy slowly turn back around, a red spot slowly growing on her stomach as Cain stumbles backward, gun in hand.

CAIN: Oh Dorothy— Oh baby I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

DOROTHY: *(long pause as everything sinks in)*. Get out of my house.

CAIN: Baby please I'll—

DOROTHY: Get. Out. Of my house.

Cain watches her for a second in shock, then drops the gun and runs offstage.

Dorothy stumbles back, gasping as she grips her stomach.

She manages to bring her hand to the chair where the flannel rests, and she removes it, bundling up the fabric and placing it against her wound.

As she speaks, she stumbles through her words, gasping and fighting as she loses blood.

DOROTHY: Death now greets me like a long awaited friend

I welcome her with open arms
She's helped me with my conflicts mend
Between us there are no holds barred
Still I would be a fool not to fear death
She is unknown and unwanted
But if greeting her means greeting also Macbeth
Then she is simply an end to exhaustion.
And though I will for eternity hate that man
And my body begins to feel like I'm floating—
I don't believe I'll ever understand
The peculiar ways we go about coping.

Dorothy begins to cough as she slides down onto the floor.

The lights fade out.

And the coughing comes to a stop.

The End.