

ANOTHER WAY OUT VII: A [MUSE] MENT PARK. HOME

CHARACTERS:

RAY.....35

THELMA.....15

3 MEN ALL PLAYED BY SAME ACTOR:

VERN.....22

GEORGE.....20

JOHN.....24

TIME: SPRING OF 1922 AND SPRING OF 1985.

PLACE: THE PARK.

In 1985, Ray sits on the bench in the park writing in a large notebook. For a time he is alone.

In 1922 THELMA enters, reading a book. She sits next to Ray and reads. Ray continues writing, then turns to her. Thelma wears a long apron/smock; her hair is up.

Thelma reads aloud:

THELMA (She is 15 here.) *"The Prince threw the sapphire amulet into the sea. As he watched, the water began to roil, the wind blew harder, a sweet smell of lilies filled the air. Slowly she rose out of the sea, all in blue—blue sky, blue water, blue hair, blue face. He stood trans. . . trans-fixed, locked in her gaze."* Oh, I want to be the blue lady coming out of the sea.

(Vern, a working-class young man, enters in 1922.)

VERN Hello, Thelma.

THELMA Mr. Vern, what brings you out of the Amusement Park this evening?

VERN I got off work early so I could see you.

THELMA (She closes her book, rises. The sound of the merry-go-round plays faintly in the background.)

Ah, the merry-go-round. They're playing the waltz again.

(She dances a little to the music.)

It's such a lovely evening, isn't it Vern? It's the kind of evening where magic can happen, just as if it were something natural.

(Stops dancing.)

A naked woman, all in blue, with hair to her feet, comes walking out of the waves, grants you a wish—any wish—and when you wish, it comes true right there. Or a giant bird with beautiful colored feathers lands next to you and tells you something about your future. Wouldn't that be a blessing, Mr. Edwards? To know something—real--of your future?

VERN Sometimes when you talk you sound like a book.

THELMA Well, I do read, Mr. Edwards. Do you know what that is, reading?

(Music ends.)

VERN I graduated from 10th grade, Thelma. You don't do that by not reading. What did you graduate from?

THELMA You know I had to leave school to help my mother. I did go to school in whatever town she worked in, until I didn't anymore. So I read, every day.

RAY (To Thelma, speaking from 1985.) So, your mother took you out of school that spring to help her clean rooms at the Amusement Park.

THELMA (To Ray. When she speaks to Ray, she seems somewhat older.) And for your story, you should also say we cleaned the cottages of the rich folk from Chicago.
(He writes that in his notebook.)

RAY (Writing.) Cottages. . . Had you been to the Amusement Park before?

THELMA For your story, I think you should say it was my second time. That way, Vern would have gotten to know me before.

RAY Second. . . time. . .
(Ray sits, writes this in his notebook. The conversation with Vern continues. Again, when she's inside the scene, she is 15.)

VERN (excitedly) You know I've been working maintenance at the Park.

THELMA A promotion from porter I believe.

VERN I've learned about painting. I like it. Now they have me climbing to the top of the rides to paint because you know why? Because I like that, too. Thelma, I want to start my own painting business, so I'm working only for myself. Painting high up, like tall buildings and water towers. What do you think?

THELMA A man should pursue his dreams, Mr. Vern. And yours seems to fit you.

VERN You know what traveling to work is like. That's what I would do; travel around the state painting high water tanks and church steeples and such things.

THELMA Traveling to work—does that sound exciting to you Vern?

VERN Well, yeah.

THELMA Well, yeah, that sounds glamorous.

VERN Yeah.

THELMA Sometimes I just want to go home. You probably don't understand that. I want to go home, but I don't know where that is. Maybe some old house, somewhere, with a porch and back yard, where I played as a child. Maybe a big old farm house, where my grandfather lived, where we raised a garden and chickens and my father worked in town while my mother made supper for all of us. Some place where I had my own room and I decorated it with animals that all my boyfriends won at the fair and gave to me. With a quilt on the bed that my grandmother made. I'd put pictures of my cousins on the walls so I'd see them every day. . . . Oh, what must you think of me, Vern, going on like a lost kitten. You may laugh at me if you like.

VERN What happened to your father, Thelma?

THELMA Apparently, he took one look at his new born daughter and saw a reason to run. Ran to where my mother can't find him, although I think she still looks up every now and again to see if he's coming down the road. Do I inspire that in you? The desire to run?

VERN I would never do that to my child. And I will have a house and a home, you'll see. Through the painting business.

THELMA Do you own a motor car?

VERN You know I don't.

THELMA Do you own a truck?

VERN Why you got to ask that?

THELMA Wouldn't you need a truck to own a painting business?

VERN So I'll buy one. And not just a truck—scaffolds and ropes and ladders—you got to buy the paint.

THELMA With your father's money?

VERN I'll earn enough money painting here to buy a truck; it'll probably take me a year, maybe two, maybe even three, but that's what I'm going to do.
 (He goes to her, hugs her.)

THELMA (Trying to loosen his grip.) That's a little tight, Vern.

VERN Do you see our future?

THELMA I can't breathe.

VERN (He turns her around, holds her.)
 Yours is right here with me. I got enough dreams for both of us. I'll take care of you, Thelma, you know I will.

THELMA What's come over you, Vern?

VERN Just this. . .
 (He turns her again, kisses her. She pulls away.)

THELMA Don't you think you should ask a girl first? Or say something sweet to her?

VERN I thought I did say sweet things to you.

THELMA (Strongly.) You can't just grab me like I'm one of your amusement girls.

VERN I thought we were passed me asking you, Thelma.

THELMA You were wrong!

VERN I thought we were planning our future.

THELMA My future is open wide, and there's a world out there—I have seen parts of it, traveling with my mother: mountains, dance halls, rivers with paddle boats with orchestra music playing. Oh! I have never been to a play! Moving pictures, yes. And vaudeville. But never a play. Have you Vern? You know, on a stage with actors that play out a story in front of you?

VERN I'll take you to the pictures.

THELMA I hear this Mr. Shakespeare wrote wonderful plays.

VERN You wouldn't like them; they're old and dull and you can't understand them. . . Well?

THELMA You'll have to say more than "well", Mr. Vern, if I am to understand you.

VERN What do you think?

THELMA Of what?

VERN My plan for us. . . Well?

THELMA And there it is again. You could just grunt for I would understand that just as well.

VERN I got to do some thinking.

THELMA Well, for mercy, don't hurt yourself.

(He starts off, stops, holds his position.)

RAY So that is Vern.

THELMA Did you write the stuff I said about a home?

RAY All of it.

THELMA Cause that's important. For when you write about John, it's important, too.

RAY John. . .

(A stagehand brings out a Portable Kodak Folding Camera and a vest and hands them to the actor playing Vern/John. The actor playing Thelma takes off her apron/smock and hands it to the stagehand. Underneath the smock she wears a lovely, simple, shirt-waste, calf-length dress. Thelma lets her hair down. Stagehand hands Thelma sheet music, then exits.)

This happens while another stagehand brings out a blanket and a picnic basket. The stagehand spreads the blanket on the ground, opens the picnic basket, and exits.

During stagehand actions, the conversation between Ray and Thelma continues.)

How should I introduce John?

THELMA

Hmm. . .I know: You should say he worked for the railroad, the railroad that ran into the amusement park, and that's how I met him.

(She looks at John, while Ray writes what she is saying.)

And he was sad, somehow. . . Let's say his mother died when he was five. Yes! And he was sent to an orphanage. Yes, an orphanage.

(Thelma sits on the bench, opens sheet music. *I can't tell you why I love you, but I do.*)

She tentatively sings, a la Harry Macdonough, 1905.:)

On a summer's day

In the month of May

A story sweet was born.

By a lonesome lad

With a heart grown sad.

To a lass with a heart grown cold. . .

(John now turns into the scene, moves behind Thelma, listening to her sing. Thelma is unaware of his presence.)

"Have I loved in vain"

He cried in pain

She answered "no" and sighed.

But I'd like you to tell why I love you so well.

(John applauds, which startles Thelma.)

John! You half scared me out of my clothes.

JOHN You must be the reason I came to this park.

THELMA How can you say that, when I met you just days ago.

JOHN What I have seen; what I have done. . .you are the answer. I believe you are. . .the opposite of my life.

THELMA I can't imagine what you mean.

(They sit on blanket, begin removing food and drinks from the basket, and proceed with their picnic through the following.)

JOHN Where is your home, Thelma?

THELMA I'm afraid I don't know, exactly. You see, we travel most of the year to work. We stay in hotels, sometimes with the wealthy folks we work for.

JOHN Well, damn. You may understand something about me, then.

THELMA Where is your home?

JOHN I stay with other folks. I'm a border. I don't have a home, either.

THELMA And do you long for one, then?

JOHN I don't remember having one. I was raised in an orphanage until the war. I guess I prefer wandering.

THELMA Wandering. . .

JOHN For me, wandering is always an adventure.

THELMA That's what I love about books, anything can happen. You never know.

JOHN I don't know if that's different from life. I never know. I just go when I go, go to where I'm going. I'll wander where people don't know who

I am, or who I have been. Or what I've done. Then again, I might call on family, friends. That's how I found you.

THELMA What brought you to me, then?

JOHN The trains.

THELMA (Not the answer she wanted.) Trains. Not the answer a girl hopes for.

JOHN I work for the railroad off and on. This is a popular stop. There are brochures all over the country talking up this place. First time I saw one, I knew I was to come here. And here you are. This is some kind of fate; don't know what kind, but meeting you on the beach, you talking to me, you singing, you dressed like that, it's got to be something special.

THELMA When you wander, what are you looking for?

JOHN Just looking. And taking photographs. I take pictures of beautiful places wherever I go, so I can recall and remember those are real, too. An alpine meadow, the grand canyon, gardens, giant trees, beaches, people. I like to show them to people. May I take your picture?

THELMA Well, sure, but. . .

(She stands, arranges her dress, adjusts her hair.)

JOHN (Standing.) Look at me. Yes, just like that. Damn.

THELMA What? Why damn? What's wrong?

JOHN You should always wear clothes like those. I have to say, you look lovely in that dress.

THELMA I thank you for such fine clothes. But I have to say, it may be scandalous that you also provided me with such undergarments.

JOHN The ladies at the store chose them.

THELMA I can't imagine the cost.

JOHN I wanted something special for your photographs. Now, stay still.

(He takes her picture. As he folds his camera, puts it on the blanket.)

Besides, "Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?"

THELMA Why Mr. John, you talk of love quicker than any man I've ever known. Except men in the moving pictures. Did you write that out yourself, or is that from some moving picture you saw?

JOHN It is from a play; Shakespeare said that about you.

THELMA Oh! Shakespeare! Say another, say another!

JOHN "I humbly do beseech of your pardon, For too much loving you"

THELMA (She takes a deep breath and sighs.)
Oh, my. And do these speeches work to get your ladies to abandon their morals?

JOHN I learn them on the trains; when I'm in a city, I go the plays, if there is one. I have said things like this before, but to the air, not to a girl. I think I may have been saving them for you.

(They stare at each other during the following.)

You are young.

THELMA You are not so old. 22 is not old.

JOHN I am old already, but you, you have all the world; you have all the time; you have all the grace.

(Short silence, as they continue to stare at each other.)

THELMA I think I see the war in you.

JOHN Then why are you not running away?

THELMA You mention the war, often. Do you want to tell me about it? For I only saw the war in the newsreels. . . Where were you?

JOHN France. In the trenches. With the dirt, the mud, and the stench. And the bodies that were once men.

THELMA Is that what you meant when you said "what you've seen?"

JOHN And what I have done, Thelma. Looking in the faces of men as they died. And I lived. I imagine their spirits wandering around everywhere, and so I wander with them. I can feel them here, now, around us; not sure why.

THELMA I can't imagine how you . . . live.

JOHN There are times, Thelma. . .

(From around his neck he pulls out the chain with the War Medal on it. He looks at, then removes the chain, and offers the medal to Thelma.)

I want you to have this.

THELMA (Taking medal.) What is it?--as, it doesn't look like something a proper girl would wear.

JOHN The purple heart. You keep the war for me. You don't have to wear it; just keep it near you. When I come back, you can return it.

THELMA When you come back. . .Ever have a desire to go to Savannah, Georgia?

JOHN Sounds as good a place as any.

THELMA It's beautiful in the autumn. It's closeby the ocean you know. We'll be down there all October. You should come call on us.

JOHN Thanks for the invitation.

(She goes to him, gently touches his face, then kisses his cheek. She takes his hand, he starts to pull it away, she insistently pulls it to her, opens his fist, kisses his hand. Then she looks

into his face, smiles. He suddenly embraces her passionately, kisses her hair, her neck. He slides down to a knee holding on to her, panting. Then he stands, breaks away.)

JOHN I have to go now.

THELMA Go?

JOHN This close to you; the way I'm feeling for you. . . I'm afraid of what I might do.

THELMA I'm not afraid.

RAY Wait a minute, wait. How old are you? We never decided. 17?

(She indicates "no.")

16? 18?

THELMA (To Ray.)

15.

RAY 15!

THELMA It will make everything more real; and more important.

(To John.)

I'm not afraid.

(He considers, then sits on the blanket.)

JOHN You should go, Thelma.

THELMA Will it hurt?

JOHN You don't know?

(With a small smile, she indicates she doesn't.)

Maybe at first.

THELMA (She glances around her.)

I know a place.

(She holds out her hand, he takes it and he stands.)

A better place, near the beach.

(To Ray.)

He stayed for 10 more days. Every night after I finished cleaning, I'd take a shower and run to meet him on the beach. I sang to him. He'd take my picture, he'd show me photographs of beautiful places he's been, and we'd lay together every evening.

(To John.)

I.. . can't leave; I have to help my mother. Will you come back?

JOHN In a year, when my vacation comes again.

THELMA A year. . . Might you wander to Savanna this October?

JOHN Most likely, yes, to see you. But I will be back here next year.

RAY And did he return in a year?

THELMA I don't know. I wasn't at the park anymore. We didn't go to Savannah. Everything changed.

(John begins to exit. He stops and holds his position during the following.

John removes his vest, and a stagehand hands John/George a jacket and a straw boater hat. Thelma rises and a stagehand hands her a scarf and helps her put on a necklace. Then the stagehand gives Thelma a bag of something, and a different book. Thelma ties the scarf in her hair, with the ends hanging

down over her shoulders. The stagehand strikes the blanket, camera, book and basket. This occurs during the following.)

I knew three weeks after John left, I was in trouble.

RAY What did your mother say?

THELMA I couldn't tell my mother! I sent Western Union to the railroad—twice—but didn't hear anything back. I believe if he had seen the telegram he would have come. I . . . I had to do something. I had to find another way out.

(She sits. Reading, the scene begins:)

"The moon rose, and she felt the moonlight hit her like a foul wind. She felt her fingers grow longer, her eyes wider, her arms stronger, her teeth sharper. She craved blood, human blood. With her swollen eyes, she could see the veins pulsing in his neck. A growl swelled up from deep inside her as she lept towards the man standing at the water's edge. She—"

GEORGE (Entering quickly.)

Thelma; Thelma Thelma Thelma, how we doin' tonight?

THELMA Just fine, George; thanks for asking.

GEORGE You got some news for me, girl?

(She proudly takes a jug of whiskey out of her bag.)

GEORGE Oh, you got the whiskey!

THELMA I said I would, George. I always keep my word, you should know; and require everyone else to do the same.

GEORGE Yes, ma'am, my basketball team will have some party, now.

(He hands her money.)

Thank you, little darlin'.

(She takes money, stuffs it down her décolletage.)

THELMA Those folks won't miss it, and even if they do, they can't report it to the police, because of the laws.

GEORGE I wish my father could sell whiskey in his concessions. We'd be filthy rich in a week. People loooovvve this stuff.

THELMA I understand you are opening two more stands this month.

GEORGE That's right. And an actual store this summer.

THELMA How many stands does your family own, now?

GEORGE With the two new stands, we'll have five.

THELMA Congratulations on a good business, George. You'll be able to work for yourself after you graduate college.

GEORGE That's the plan, ma'am. Thanks, Thelma. We'll have to do this again sometime. Soon!

(He starts off.)

THELMA Why, Mr. George, are you not a gentleman?

GEORGE What?

THELMA Aren't you going to offer a girl a drink?

GEORGE Oh. Yes? You want. . . ? All right, Little Darlin'

(He unscrews the top of the bottle, offers it to her)

THELMA You first.

(He takes a drink; it is harsh. Grimacing.)

GEORGE Ya ya yaahh! Excellent.

(He offers it to her; she takes it. She smells it, looks at him, smiles, then determinedly takes a drink, grimaces, turns away from him, coughs, shivers. He laughs.)

Good, huh?

THELMA Excellent. Have some more, Georgie.

(He takes bottle back, drinks another drink.)

You know, I've been thinking about you. Watching you run on the beach and doing your exercises. You're strong. You have. . . elegance to your movements.

GEORGE Got to stay in shape; you know, for basketball.

THELMA You're the captain of the team, right?

GEORGE That's right.

THELMA I find that. . . interesting. You take charge. You know what to do. Have another drink; then I might have another, too. I can always get more.

(George drinks, then hands bottle over to Thelma. Resolutely she takes another drink, tries to smile through the pain.)

Do you have any other. . .unlawful—not unlawful—any other. . .immoral desires besides alcohol?

RAY (Shocked.) Wait a minute, wait. What am I seeing, here?

THELMA (To Ray.) You tell me what else to do! My mother has no money. We can't travel with a child! You saw the sadness in John—living in an orphanage all those years. Who would want that for a child!

RAY George doesn't deserve this.

THELMA He can say "no." He has a girlfriend, Irene Fairbanks.

RAY Why George?

THELMA I like him well enough. And he's smart—he goes to college.

RAY And his father has money.

THELMA I need to stop wandering. I need a home.

RAY In my story he says "no."

THELMA This story isn't your story anymore.

RAY There must be another way for you.

THELMA (Again, to George.)
Do you have any other. . .unlawful—not unlawful—any other. .
.immoral desires besides alcohol?

GEORGE What do you mean?

THELMA I don't know if a girl should ever speak her whole mind. It could lead to all manner of misunderstanding. Or maybe even to some delightful trouble.

GEORGE I wish I knew what you meant, Thelma. Sometimes you speak like one of those poems in literature class I don't understand.

THELMA There's a mystery here, Georgie, and since you are in college, I hope you can solve it. Until then, I'll just imagine all good things about you and maybe some of them will come true.

GEORGE What's the mystery?

THELMA Good lord, George.
(She moves to him and kisses him lightly on the mouth. She then takes the hat off his head, puts it on her head.)

I know a place, near the beach, where we could be alone.
(George takes a drink, considers, looks her over. He then nods "yes". Thelma turns to Ray.)

You'll just have to understand that girl. And forgive her. And make the readers of your story forgive her.

(A stagehand brings out a different book, takes the other book from Thelma. She hands hat to stagehand, then sits on bench and reads.

George takes off his jacket, hands it to stagehand, who exits with it. The actor will now play Vern again.

Thelma reads. Vern enters.)

VERN Hello, Thelma.

THELMA Why, Mr. Vern, hello.

VERN I got to get back to work soon, so. . .

THELMA (Closing book.)

Well, what is it, Vern? You look like somebody ate the last piece of your favorite chocolate cake.

VERN I've been talking with George's father.

THELMA Oh?

VERN He's going to buy me a truck! So I can start my own painting business right away.

THELMA Why, Vern, that is wonderful news!

VERN And he's going to buy all the supplies—the paint, the ropes, the ladders, everything.

THELMA That's your dream come true—and so soon!

VERN Yeah, yeah, this is. . . this is good, Thelma.

THELMA It's great!

VERN Yeah, great. Could be. Could be. Thelma, George dropped out of college; did you know that?

THELMA What?

VERN His father sent him to live in Chicago.

THELMA Are you sure you heard right, Vern? Why would George just drop his studies and move to—

VERN George is afraid you'll accuse him and he'll go to jail.

THELMA I'm sure I don't know what you are talking about.

VERN George's father will buy that truck—I already picked it out—he'll buy it, if you marry me.

THELMA Marry you? . . . You?

VERN And soon, Thelma, before you, you know, before you start showing. You know how I feel about you, Thelma. And now, I can provide for you. I can make you a home. You won't have to go wandering around the country anymore.

THELMA George is gone?

VERN Moved to Chicago. Hiding from you, I suppose. That college boy has no responsibility for anything. I guess that's what money can do for you.
 (Short silence.)
If you want, I'll talk to your mother. I could tell her everything; or just take responsibility.

THELMA How could you. . . how could you love me, and someone else's child.

VERN Hell, I already forgive you, Thelma. I'm sure George took advantage of you. That's what guys like him do—they just take what they want. I'm not like that. You know me.

RAY And so you marry Vern.

THELMA A week later.

RAY And that's the end of the story.

THELMA Story? That is how it happened. And that's not the end, only the beginning of a bunch of stories.

RAY And you had a child?

THELMA Your father. Your father came early—with no hair. Cried a lot. And he seemed angry. I had never known an angry baby. But then, when he was two, he would take off all his clothes and run around the house laughing and jumping on furniture. That was a happy time. And gave me hope for him.

At 17, he went off to war like his father John. That same sadness that lived in John grew in him. And now I see it in you.

(Short Silence.)

I see why you like your story. But who else is going to care about it anyway? Just a story of everyday people trying to get by. Where's the beauty in that? Where's the celebration?

THE END.