

## Second Hand Life<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This play was developed during Tahatto's writing workshop *Ok, what's the Scene?* in May 2020. The workshop required participants to weave a script out of a set of given prompts. The prompts for this particular piece were a living room, an unpublished manuscript, a person who doesn't remember the events of the previous night.

## CHARACTERS

X: A WOMAN OF ABOUT 27

Y : A MAN OF ABOUT 30

A KING

A JESTER

*(A bare room – hardly any furniture except for a couch and a coffee table. The floor is dirty and strewn with bottles and remnants of a half-eaten supper. X is on the couch, a glass with a drink beside her, staring distantly at the space in front of her, where the following scene is unfolding. It appears to be a king’s courtroom. There are two men in bright, colorful outfits. One appears to be more heavily dressed than the other. This entire scene takes place like a dream sequence).*

JESTER:           What makes up a dream? Is it a word? Is it an image? Is it a combination of the two? Or is it the act of sleeping that allows for the possibility of it in the first place? Or is the act of waking up that prompts the reader to examine the dissonances between her dream and her reality? Is it the recognition of this dissonance?

KING:                You’re getting way too philosophical for me Madhava. The question was simple. What did you dream of?

JESTER:            But your Majesty, that is precisely what I am trying to clarify. I don’t know what a dream is. You see, your Majesty, it is precisely this philosophical disposition of mine that keeps me up at night. With no sleep, I can know no dreams.

KING: Madhava, don't test my patience. I was told that this was not just a dream, but a prophecy. And, mind you, I will get it from you at all costs.

JESTER: Pardon me your Majesty but aren't you giving a little too much importance to what is supposedly happening inside my head? I think Your Majesty, that we will be far better off if we focused on what is happening at the present. In the moment.

KING: *(The king motions to his guards)* Guards! Take him away!

*(The dream sequence ends. X is jolted by a knock on the door. The courtroom is disbanded leaving only X in the room. The door opens and in walks a slightly older-looking man, Y. Y is well-dressed and looks affluent).*

Y: Hey. Your newspapers were outside. *(awkward pause as X and Y just stare at each other)*. Well, I just thought I'd bring them in.

*(Y proceeds to place the newspaper on the table and then goes to the kitchen to get some water. A long pause ensues as Y tries to search for a clean glass. Y then comes back to the living room. X is oscillating between anger and befuddlement).*

So, how have you been?

X: (pause) Good.

Y: Any luck with sleep?

*(X doesn't say anything. She follows Y's movements as Y goes to the kitchen and pours himself a glass of water).*

X: Weren't you here just a couple of days ago? (pause) Well?

Y: Yeah, but this is different. I-

X: Listen, I don't have time for this. Please leave.

*(Pause).* Leave, please. I told you, I'm not talking to anyone about this. The last time I did, it was --- Look, I am fine. Okay? Let me be.

*(Pause. Y places the glass of water down).*

Y: You called me. Last night.

X: Last night?

Y: Yeah. Don't you remember?

X: *(laughs)* When was the last time I remembered what happened ‘last night?’  
*(Walks up to the kitchen to refill her drink).*

Y: Don’t. It’s two in the afternoon for god’s sake.

X: Oh this isn’t for his sake. It’s for mine.

*(Pause)*

X: So I called, did I?

Y: Yes.

X: And?

*(Pause)*

Y: Well. You, um.

X: *I what?*

*(pause)*

Y: You said you were ready to sell it.

X: What? There is absolutely no way I would have said that. *(Goes back to her drink)*. Don't think you can get me so easily.

Y: Get you? Really? What do you think is in it for me?

X: Oh so we're going down that path now? Are you really just going to stand there and tell me that you're going to get nothing if I sell that script? I'm going to make tons and I can finally stop living off of you. You'll only have your family to worry about. Don't tell me that that doesn't sound enticing.

Y: You're my family too.

*(X smirks, and downs her drink. Pours another one).*

Y: I think this is for the best. *(Takes her hand)* It's been three years —

X: Precisely! It's been three years! I would never just let it go like that —through a phone call --

Y: But that's the point isn't it? You've spent three years of your life holding on to it. And... Appa... And look where it has brought you —

X: I don't need the judgment.

Y: It is not judgment —

X: I really don't need the 'Oh what you could have done with your life' lecture again. I—

Y: That's not what I am saying. I am just saying that maybe it's high time you let go of this crap that has –

X: Don't call it crap –

Y: He is dead. Appa is dead. It's been three bloody years and you better make your peace with it. You have to fucking let go. There is nothing in that manuscript that explains why he was the person he was. And you looking for it in his writing, to try and justify why he was never there – that's just frankly insulting. To me. And to Amma.

X: Don't you dare –

Y: No, don't you dare. Don't you bloody dare stop me this time. I've been trying to have this conversation with you for three years.

X: I don't want a fucking conversation.

Y : Well, maybe I do.

*(Pause)*

*(Blackout. The lights come on again and we see both of them sitting down, leaning on the couch).*

Y: What - - what is so precious in this? It's not even his best writing. *(Chuckles)*

X: *(sighs)* Yeah.

But it's the only piece of his writing that's not out there.

And because he left it for me, I thought that maybe... I don't know. Maybe he was trying to tell me something? Maybe this is his story for me? Just me? Maybe I would get to know him better. Better in his death than I would ever know him in life.

*(pause)*

And once it goes out there, and people read this, his words will become theirs too. These, his words, are all I know of him. And frankly, all that I remember of him. I don't want to lose that. I don't want to corrupt that.

*(For the first time X makes genuine eye contact with Y)*

I am not ready for that.

*(They maintain eye contact for some time and Y suddenly looks away).*

Y:                   There is something you should know. About this. About him.

X:                   What?

*(Pause)*

Y:                   I don't know how much you remember about Amma. But she used to write too. In fact, that's all I remember about her. Her sitting on a desk and writing.



*(Looks at Y)* Do you remember that one time, when Appa told you that story about the king and his Jester? When you asked him what a dream was?

X: Yeah, of course. That's my favorite of his. It's the first one in that *(Gestures to the manuscript)*.

Y: Yeah.

Except – it's not his.

*(X turns to him. Pause)*

Amma used to tell me the story. Before I went to bed. You were really young then. I used to have trouble sleeping too, you know, as a kid. And she came up with this whole story about how this jester couldn't dream because he couldn't sleep.

*(Silence)*

X: Wow. I –

So the story is not his?

*Y looks at X and shakes his head)*

*(Pause)*

X:                   *(Shocked)* The story wasn't his. It wasn't for me.

Wait. So his other stories – are they all –

Y:                   Yeah.

X:                   Oh. *(Sighs)*

Wow, so he – so he was really – whoever he was, whatever I know of him – it's not real. And I've been holding on to that. A shadow – his shadow.

*(Pause. She breaks down.)*

*(Turns to look at Y)*

So he was actually living off her dreams?

And if he was living her dreams, what was she living?

What have I been holding on to all this while?

*(Pause)*

Y:                   You know, Amma never had the chance to find out. He published his first – her first book in his name only after she died.

I've thought about it many times. How all this would have panned out if she were alive. Would she have even wanted them to be published? And if she did, why didn't she do it when she was alive?

*(Looks at X, smiles).* Now we can sit and think about this together. We'll never know but – we could weave our own story.

*(X has calmed down a little. She smiles as she wipes her tears).*

X: Like the jester makes up a dream to give to the king. *(Smiles)*

Y: Wait. What?

X: In the story, with the jester and the king, he makes up a dream, remember? In the end – to save himself from the king.

Y: No. The guards drag him away. That's it. There was no dream. The whole point of her telling me that story was that I'd be so curious about dreams after the story that I'd sleep. And it worked. That story always helped me sleep.

X: *(Flipping through the script)* But in this script, after the guards take him away they spend the night talking about the different dreams they've had. To make the jester understand what a dream is. And then he goes to the king the next morning and tells him this made-up story. That's where it ends. *(Hands the script over to Y).*

*(Y takes the script and reads it. Puts it down and smiles at X).*

Y: Appa was the only one who ever knew both endings.

*(X takes the manuscript in her hands. Looks at it and then looks at Y).*

*(Pause)*

X: *(Holding back her tears)* Do you think – that maybe this is why he didn't publish it? Because this was for me? It was his gift – just for me?

*(Pause)*

Y: I wonder how many of my childhood stories are in there with different endings. *(Smiles)*

X: This is the 'would have been' of my childhood.

*(Pause. Looks at Y who is smiling at her. They embrace).*

*(A blue light takes over the room as the siblings continue to embrace. The Jester's voice is heard. At this cue, they sit up and pour over the manuscript. They pay no attention to the gesture).*

JESTER: I am willing to tell you my dream, your Majesty. If what is happening inside my head is so important to you, if the world inside my head is better than the

world you have around you right now, if you want to live my dreams, your Majesty, then I will, by all means, give them to you.

My dream saw two people, your Majesty, like you and I. One let go and one held on. And that's where it all began.

**The End**