

THE FOG

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A Play

by

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Cast of Characters

Schuler

Metz

Scene:

A rocky peninsula jutting out into an enormous lake.  
On all sides, fog.

AT RISE: (SCHULER and METZ make their way across the rocks.)

SCHULER  
Careful on this one. It's slippery.

METZ  
You're the one that slipped earlier. I can see that it's slippery.

SCHULER  
I'm only giving you fair warning.

METZ  
Fair warning is right.

SCHULER  
It is right.

METZ  
It's only because you have longer legs that you can climb faster than I can. Biological advantage.

SCHULER  
I wouldn't say it was anything else.

METZ  
You certainly were suggesting it just then.

SCHULER  
When?

METZ  
When you were giving me fair warning about that slippery rock there.

SCHULER  
I was only suggesting that the rock was slippery.

METZ

Ah, but that isn't what you said. You said, 'Metz, this rock is slippery.' But what you meant to say was, 'Metz, look how much more agile I am. Look at me as I leap across this slippery rock, leaving you and your short legs behind me.' Am I right?

SCHULER

No.

METZ

It's true that I am not always right. I'm not even often right. But those odds are easily manipulated. For instance, I could say, 'this fog is thicker than pea soup,' and I would be right, but I could follow it by saying that men hatch out of eggs, which I know isn't right. And if I say that men hatch out of eggs eight more times, statistically, I would only be right once out of ten times. Right?

SCHULER

Right. (Beat.) Speaking of which: this fog.

METZ

Yes. This fog.

(They look at the fog.)

SCHULER

Do you hear that?

METZ

What?

SCHULER

You have to listen first.

METZ

I am listening.

SCHULER

Hush.

(They listen. Very faintly, the sound of a motor boat passing by can be heard. It fades away.)

METZ

Ah. I see now.

SCHULER

Did you see it?

METZ

I can't see anything in this fog.

SCHULER

(Pointing.)

Over there.

METZ

(Looking hard into the fog.)

I can't see anything.

SCHULER

It's gone.

METZ

Then why would you make me look?

SCHULER

It was a boat, I think. I could just see it through the fog, floating like a ghost. Just for a moment before it was gone.

METZ

I hope he doesn't hit the rocks.

SCHULER

Isn't there a lighthouse?

METZ

I hope there is, or all of our time will have been wasted.

SCHULER

I'm content having seen the boat.

METZ

Well, I didn't see the boat. I want to see the lighthouse.

SCHULER

Are you certain there's a lighthouse?

METZ

Yes, I'm certain.

SCHULER

I don't see the light.

METZ

We're not there yet.

SCHULER

If I can't see the light, the boat can't see the light.

(They pause and look toward where SCHULER saw the boat.)

METZ

I hope he doesn't hit the rocks.

SCHULER

This fog.

METZ

Yes. This fog.

(Pause.)

SCHULER

Would you look behind us?

METZ

I don't figure I should.

SCHULER

The fog is just as thick there as it is in front of us. If one wasn't careful, they'd forget which way they came from and which way they were going.

METZ

Wouldn't that be something?

SCHULER

Let's not let it come to that.

METZ

I suppose the best we can do is keep going forward.

SCHULER

Is it much farther, do you think?

METZ

How far have we come?

SCHULER

(Looking back.)

It's hard to say with this fog.

METZ

Then it's hard to say how much farther we've to go.

SCHULER

If it's much farther, we had better go back.

METZ

I don't know if it's much farther, so we should simply keep going until we get there. Then, we'll know how far it will be on the way back.

(SCHULER stares ahead into the fog for some time. After some time, METZ notices.)

Do you see another boat?

SCHULER

I'm looking at the peninsula.

METZ

Did your boat crash?

SCHULER

You would have heard it if it had.

METZ

What are you looking at? The lighthouse?

SCHULER

I can't see the lighthouse.

METZ

Then what?

SCHULER

The fog.

METZ

You're looking at the fog.

SCHULER

In the fog, I think.



METZ

Is there something there?

SCHULER

There could be. We wouldn't know.

METZ

If we take a few steps forward, we'll know if there's something there.

SCHULER

It takes a few steps back.

METZ

What?

SCHULER

Suppose it takes a few steps back and goes deeper into the fog.

METZ

Then we'll find out what's there when we reach the end of the peninsula. We'll hear it fall off and splash into the lake.

SCHULER

Do you think it would do that? If I were backing away from someone into a fog, I'd stop before I fell in the lake.

METZ

Is it you backing away from us in the fog?

SCHULER

I don't think there's anything.

METZ

Then why do you keep trying to convince me?

SCHULER

It's a hypothetical. A Pavlov's Cat problem. There's someone in the fog, and there's no one in the fog, and we won't know until we open the box. But if I ring a bell-

(SCHULER pulls out a small, tinkly bell and rings it.)

The thing in the fog dies.

METZ

That's not right.

SCHULER

The thing in the fog is dead now, and I'm the killer. How does it make you feel to be stuck in the fog with a killer?

METZ

There was nothing in the fog.

SCHULER

Are you certain?

METZ

(After a long, thoughtful pause.)

No.

SCHULER

Then I could very well be a killer, you see?

METZ

(Pointing to the left side of the peninsula.)

There is a family out there, standing to their knees in the lake water. They came here on a vacation to get away from a terrible house where the roof leaks all day, even when it isn't raining, and dogs bark in the

METZ (Cont.)

house next door from sunset to sunrise. The children came home from school on Tuesday, and they left Wednesday morning to arrive now. They set out when the fog was still thin, planning to see the lighthouse. The youngest child drew a picture of what he thought it would look like. He's going to be a talented artist, Schuler. But Mother slipped off of the rocks and into the lake. The children followed her into the water, and now they can't climb back up because the rocks are slick.

(A pause.)

SCHULER

I told you the rocks were slippery.

(METZ lets out a cry of frustration.)

What?

METZ

There is no family in the water, Schu.

SCHULER

You don't know that.

METZ

I made it up.

(SCHULER sighs and sits down on the rock.)

Now what are you doing?

SCHULER

I'm thinking, Metz. Sometimes, I think you should try it.

METZ

There's no need to be mean.

SCHULER

How do you think they got here?

METZ

I told you, there's no family in the lake.

SCHULER

The rocks. Did they put them here when they built the lighthouse?

METZ

They wouldn't need a lighthouse if there weren't rocks.

SCHULER

All the more reason to put them here. (Beat.) I like to imagine, if you'll stay with me, that it was once an enormous tree growing out of the place where we started. Can you picture it? Growing straight up into the sky, and then boom. Down, down into the lake, shattering into a million pieces. And all of the birds roosting in its branches lifted into the air at once. Enough birds to block out the sun, even for a little while, so the world was dark. No one could see it fall, but when the waves settled and the birds went their ways, there was a peninsula.

METZ

That's what you like to imagine?

SCHULER

I think so.

METZ

I like to imagine that we've arrived at the lighthouse, Schuler.

SCHULER

Sometimes I like to imagine pushing you off that rock into the lake.

METZ

I would gladly jump in the lake if you would stop carressing that rock and get on with our walk.

(A long pause.)

The fog is settling in.

(SCHULER looks around, finding this to be true.)

SCHULER

So it is. We should head back, I suppose. We aren't going to see the lighthouse today.

METZ

We have to.

SCHULER

If you like, we can come back tomorrow when the fog has lifted.

METZ

There is no tomorrow. I have to see it today.

SCHULER

The lighthouse will still be there, I'm certain of it, Metz.

METZ

You're not even certain there isn't someone standing ten feet ahead of us in the fog taking a few steps back every time we take a few steps forward. You aren't certain there isn't a family wading aimlessly through the lake. You ring a little bell without being

METZ (Cont.)

certain of whether or not it will kill someone. Schu, you aren't certain of anything. I want to see this lighthouse, and I will. It's right there, just out of sight. I'm. Certain.

(SCHULER stands and walks a few paces past METZ. Silence. Eventually, METZ joins SCHULER.)

What?

SCHULER

You see? You're wrong.

METZ

About what?

SCHULER

Just out of sight, you said. It should be right here.

METZ

Listen here, Schuler.

SCHULER

I'm listening, Metz, but you're not saying anything.

METZ

There you go again being mean to me. Just because I want to see the lighthouse. If you had suggested going to see the lighthouse, we'd still be walking.

SCHULER

I said we can see the lighthouse tomorrow.

METZ

That's what you'll say tomorrow too. And the next tomorrow and the next. Tomorrow is never going to come, Schuler. All there is is today. That's all we've

METZ (Cont.)

got. What happens when we wake up tomorrow? Will you say, 'Metz, wake up. It's tomorrow.' No. You'll say, 'Metz, wake up. It's today.' Today, Schuler. And once again, you will suggest we see the lighthouse tomorrow.

(SCHULER places a hand on METZ's shoulder.)

SCHULER

Then we will see it today. The today that will happen after the sun has set once and risen again.

(METZ pushes SCHULER's hand away.)

METZ

Patronize me one more time, Schuler. I dare you.

SCHULER

Don't push me. I'll slip.

(METZ pushes SCHULER.)

METZ

I hope you do.

(They tussle for quite some time before SCHULER's ankle twists.)

SCHULER

(Crying out.)

Stop. Stop. My ankle.

(METZ stops fighting and helps SCHULER up, but the injured ankle cannot bear any weight.)

METZ

Wonderful. Now, we'll never get to the lighthouse.

SCHULER

Forget about the lighthouse for a moment please. I'm hurt.

(METZ inspects SCHULER's ankle.)

METZ

It's not broken, is it?

SCHULER

I don't think so. I didn't feel a snap.

METZ

(Poking SCHULER's ankle.)

Is it tender?

SCHULER

Ouch. Yes. Don't do that.

METZ

Can you walk?

SCHULER

I don't think so. Give me a moment.

METZ

Here, let me help you.

(METZ heaves SCHULER up only for both of them to collapse back to the rocks.)

SCHULER

You'd better not try that again. You'll get hurt too.

METZ

What are we going to do with you?



SCHULER

Do with me? Put me down like a racehorse?

METZ

That is one choice, yes.

SCHULER

Metz.

METZ

I can't very well carry you to the lighthouse.

SCHULER

No, you very well can't.

METZ

What if we get into the water and float you there?

SCHULER

I'd rather not get my shoes wet.

(METZ sits down beside SCHULER. Silence.)

METZ

Eventually, I leave you, and you die out here.

SCHULER

And when does that happen? Tomorrow?

(METZ smiles. Silence.)

When you do leave, be sure to take my wallet and my bell. Leave my shoes. I don't want to be buried barefoot.

METZ

I don't think you'll be buried, my friend.

SCHULER

Eventually. By the lake. The rocks. The fog.

METZ

Ah, this fog.

SCHULER

Do you think anyone else has been buried here?

METZ

Maybe.

SCHULER

There are a hundred bodies floating in the lake, you know. They bob in the water and bump against the peninsula with every wave. Just out of sight.

METZ

Are you certain?

SCHULER

No.

METZ

May I see the bell?

(SCHULER hands the bell to METZ. METZ inspects it before giving it a ring.)

SCHULER

And?

METZ

What happened?

SCHULER

You rang my bell.

METZ

Yes.

SCHULER

Oh. Well, I suppose everything happened.

METZ

(Nodding.)

Everything and absolutely nothing. How's your ankle?

SCHULER

(Giving it a shake.)

It still hurts.

METZ

Can you walk?

SCHULER

I can try. Help me up.

(METZ helps SCHULER up.)

METZ

What do you think?

SCHULER

It's tender, but it should get me there alright.

METZ

Very good.

(METZ takes a step in one direction while  
SCHULER steps in the other.)

Schuler.

SCHULER

I thought you still wanted to go to the lighthouse.

METZ

That's where I'm going.

SCHULER

It's this way.

METZ

We were going this way before.

SCHULER

I'm certain we were going this way.

METZ

You're certain?

SCHULER

(After a long, thoughtful pause.)

No.

(METZ cries out in frustration and studies both directions several times.)

METZ

I think you're right. We were going that way.

SCHULER

Now that I think about it, we could have been going that way.

METZ

I'm sure we were going this way.

SCHULER

This way?

METZ

No. This one. I'm all turned around. Where did you hurt your ankle?

SCHULER

(Pointing.)

Right there.

METZ

And I came at you like this.

(METZ gently recreates the shove from their previous fight.)

So it must be this way.

SCHULER

But you had been standing on this side of me, not that one.

METZ

Then it's that way.

SCHULER

But that's the way you were going before.

METZ

Schuler.

SCHULER

Metz.

METZ

I was wrong.

SCHULER

You are ninety percent of the time.

METZ

I was wrong. You don't die out here.

SCHULER

Oh?

METZ

We both do.

(SCHULER considers this for a moment.)

SCHULER

I've had a thought.

METZ

Yes?

SCHULER

Climb down and look at the direction the waves are going. We go in the opposite.

METZ

(Already approaching the water.)

Brilliant.

SCHULER

Thank you.

(METZ hesitates.)

SCHULER

What? What is it?

METZ

The bodies.

SCHULER

What bodies?

METZ

The ones in the lake that bump against the rocks.

SCHULER

There are no bodies.

METZ

Are you certain?

SCHULER

No.

(METZ returns to SCHULER's side.)

METZ

Now what?

SCHULER

I suppose we walk.

METZ

Which way?

SCHULER

Choose one.

METZ

(After a slight pause, pointing.)

That one.

SCHULER

Excellent. Let's go.

METZ

You think this is the right way?

SCHULER

I think that I remember how far we've traveled, and if we find that we've traveled the same distance and then some, we're heading toward the lighthouse. If we find that we travel the same distance and end up on the shore, we're safe.

METZ

Brilliant.

(They begin walking, SCHULER just a few steps ahead of METZ. Silence for some time.)

SCHULER

Careful on this one. It's slippery.

METZ

You're the one that slipped earlier. I can see that it's slippery.

SCHULER

I'm only giving you fair warning.

METZ

Fair warning is right.

SCHULER

It is right.

METZ

It's only because you have longer legs that you can climb faster than I can. A biological advantage.

SCHULER

I wouldn't say it was anything else.

METZ

You certainly were suggesting it just then.

SCHULER

When?

METZ

When you were giving me fair warning about that slippery rock there.



SCHULER

I was only suggesting that the rock was slippery.

METZ

Ah, but that isn't what you said. You said, 'Metz, this rock is slippery.' But what you meant to say was, 'Metz, look how much more agile I am. Look at me as I leap across this slippery rock, leaving you and your short legs behind me.' Am I right?

SCHULER

No.

METZ

It's true that I am not always right. I'm not even often right. But those odds are easily manipulated. For instance, I could say, 'this fog is thicker than pea soup,' and I would be right, but I could follow it by saying that men hatch out of eggs, which I know isn't right. And if I say that men hatch out of eggs eight more times, statistically, I would only be right once out of ten times. Right?

SCHULER

Right. (Beat) Speaking of which: this fog.

METZ

Yes. This fog.

(They look at the fog.)

END