

CARAPACES

by

RALEIGH MARCELL

912-660-7616
raleighmarcell@gmail.com

FADE IN

EXT. A PARK. DAY.

Various big-city PARKSTERS passing by a Park Bench, unoccupied.

A dirty, ragged, long-bearded man, HE, backs into the scene, ball-cap in hand.

His tattered and ragged clothes say homeless though they are a jacket, vest, and tie. He wears a cape displaying a huge golden Cross.

HE
(shouting off)
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

He empties his hat of money, kicking the money away.

HE (CONT'D)
I DON'T WANT YOUR MONEY! I DON'T
WANT YOUR APPROVAL! I want your
souls.

Several Parksters give him a wide berth during this outburst.

He puts on his hat, girds, and sings:

HE (CONT'D)
"Shall we gather at the Park Bench
Where pink pigeon feet have perched
A peeling oasis in the city
Refuge For the dis-en-churched."

During this, several CHILDREN eagerly scoop up the strewn money.

HE (CONT'D)
BEHOLD!

The Children scatter in all directions.

HE (CONT'D)
Behold ---

He robotically surveys the compass points ending on and following a BUSINESSMAN, on his cellphone, who does not stop or acknowledge Him.

HE (CONT'D)
NOW IT CAME TO PASS THAT GOD....

He does the points again, this time following a sweat-suited WOMAN, scrolling and ear-budded, with the same result.

HE (CONT'D)
 ...and then THE LORD said unto me,
 only me, and no one else but...

As the Woman goes, He flamboyantly bull-fighters his cape,
 switching the Cross to a Crucifix.

HE (CONT'D)
 ---me.

Undeterred, He spots another in the distance---

HE (CONT'D)
 You! Over there! Yes, YOU!

And he sprints off.

After several DOG-WALKERS amble through the scene, SHE
 enters, carrying a couple of bags, one handled, one not.

She wears a wooly beige pull-over sweater over a blouse with
 an almost too long skirt. She is plain and her face is
 flushed. Of course she wears glasses.

She is hesitant to sit on the Bench, but she does, fanning
 herself with her hand.

He re-enters, tucking, tying, and straightening, though
 still ragged and dirty.

A GRANDPA, using a walker creeps into the scene---

HE (CONT'D)
 ...NOW IT CAME TO PASS that the
 Lord spoke to me saying, "You shall
 find a New Religion." And I said,
 "You mean FOUND a new religion."
 And God said, "No we don't. The new
 religion is not lost therefore it
 cannot be found." "But, O Lord, if
 it cannot be found then it must
 indeed be lost." AND THE LORD SAID,
 "You see, I'm right: you must find
 A New Religion."

The Grandpa stops and straightens to his full height,
 face-to-face with Him---

GRANDPA
 That don't make sense!

And the grandpa trundles on his way.

HE
 The ways of the Lord are indeed a
 mystery!

He notices Her.

She gathers her bags close, trying not to notice Him.

HE (CONT'D)
Do you know what the New Religion
is called?

SHE
(reluctantly)
....No

HE
Yes know

SHE
(defensively)
NO!

HE
(offhandedly)
That's because I do not as yet have
a name for it.

He twirls deftly and is sitting on the bench before She can react.

HE
(intensely)
And then just last week in my back
screen door, were the images of two
faces. "In the back screen door
were the images of faces. And their
number was two."

SHE
In the screen door...?

HE
(pouncing)
You don't believe me?!

SHE
I...

HE
YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME?

SHE
(she doesn't)
I believe you.

He jumps off the bench, goes away, returns half way.

HE

Go ahead, say what you think. You don't believe me, do you?

SHE

Believe me, I believe you...

HE

Say it! Say it! SAY IT! SAY THAT YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME!!

SHE

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU!

HE

(imploringly sincere)

You've got to believe me.

(calmly)

In the back screen door. Of which I have a Photo-Graph. Original and untouched.

He takes a photo from his pocket, places it on the bench and then moves away.

She tries to avoid glancing down at it but just as her eyes unavoidably rotate he snatches it up.

HE

---or maybe you don't know what a Photo-Graph is....

He takes out his phone, quickly scrolling.

HE (CONT'D)

There! It's had ten-thousand hits.

But just as he goes to show her he again jerks back.

HE (CONT'D)

You think I'm crazy, don't you?

SHE

(he's crazy)

I don't think you're crazy.

HE

(he knows she thinks he's crazy)

Go ahead, say what you're thinking: You think I'm crazy, don't you?

SHE

Look, I...

HE
SAY IT! SAY IT! SAY THAT I'M CRAZY!

SHE
YOU'RE CRAZY! YOU'RE CRAZY!

HE
(slowly, calmly then
craftily)
Maybe I am but I wouldn't be crazy
unless I wanted to be and I don't
want to be therefore I'm not.
Crazy.

He gingerly places both the photo and phone on the bench
then steps away. Then leaves.

Her curiosity gradually overcomes her fear and she turns her
head to glance at the objects. Another moment and she
reaches down to turn over the photo, leaving it on the
bench.

She looks up and around. She does not see him.

She looks more carefully and longer at the photo, still on
the bench.

He appears in the distance, behind the bench, carefully
creeping closer.

She picks up the photo examining it closer and closer.

He stands behind her, arms outstretched.

HE
(biblically)
The faces in the screen door are
that of John the Baptist and Peter
who was not called Simon the
fisherman.

He moves to the side of the bench but still a respectable
distance.

Too frozen with fear to bolt, engagement is her only option.

HE (CONT'D)
You've got to look closely.

She does, seemingly trying, during which he approaches
closer.

HE
See. There's the face of Peter, who
was not called Simon.

SHE
(pointing)
And what is this?

He backs away a bit.

HE
Well, he... he's eating a fish.

She seems to take this in.

SHE
(pointing)
And that?

He peeks from distance.

HE
(defensively)
That's... John the Baptist's hand.

She looks up, raising an eyebrow.

SHE
Alright.... And the fuzzy stuff?

HE
Parsley. He's holding a bunch of
parsley.

SHE
And what is that?

HE
(defensively)
Um --- a banana.

SHE
In his ear?

HE
You're being too analytical!

SHE
But John the Baptist with a banana
in his ear?

HE
Certain scholars maintain that it
might be... a cigar.

SHE
That's reassuring.

Beads of perspiration have broken out on her face and she
seems to go weak for a moment.

HE
Are you okay?

SHE
Don't hurt me!

HE
(backing away)
I am not going to hurt you.

SHE
Have you escaped from somewhere?

HE
(threateningly
suspicious)
Why do you ask that?

SHE
No reason! I just...

HE
---YOU JUST...want to know. Right?

SHE
(speak calmly & don't
make sudden moves)
Yeah...Yes... That's right. I just
wanted to know...That's all.

HE
Then, if you must know... Must you
know?

SHE
I must.

HE
Then, yes, I've escaped. Thrice:
First, from the womb. Then, home.
And now, life. Of course the
ultimate escape from life is death
but as can see I'm not dead, only
gloriously, splendidly FREE!

SHE
WHAT DO YOU WANT?!!

He starts toward her.

HE
Hey, look, I'm...

In a frenzy, she digs into one of the bags, extracting what looks like a canister of mace or pepper spray. All the time shouting, "Stay away! Stay away!"

She jumps to her feet, holds the mace at arm's length and, turning her head away, "fires" at him, resulting in a bright orange plastic string covering him.

HE (CONT'D)
 (on his knees)
 Oh please stop it! Stop it! You're
 killing me!

She turns, sees him kneeling there looking like a Christmas tree. She examines the cannister.

HE
 I can save you the trouble -- it's
 not pepper spray.

Her examination has allowed him to approach and he gently takes the cannister from her and steps back.

HE (CONT'D)
 Ah, here it is --
 (reading)
 "To be used if threatened or
 molested by a clown. To use: aim at
 the jocular area and fire. Not
 effective against mimes."
 (handing it back)
 Figures. Nothing's effective
 against mimes. Filthy creatures.

SHE
 It doesn't say that.

He has turned his back to her as he brushes the string away.
 She uses the moment to almost smile.

SHE
 Oh no!

She just as furiously as before extracts a cellphone from one of the bags.

SHE
 Jenny? This is your auntie. Don't
 use the silly string I got you!
 Call me back!

She steps back, takes a deep breath, relieved, but then her current predicament overtakes her as an increasing faintness and weakness.

HE
 AND THE LORD said unto me, "Forget
 the Ten Commandments".

SHE

What?!

HE

"Very good. Very-very good." AND HE proceeded to give unto me the Cornerstones of the New Religion which are called THE FOUR SUGGESTIONS: Be Nice, Be Moderate, Hey, Don't Blame God, and every once in a while put on somebody else's shoes now I know what you're thinking that that may be good for the soul but what about the feet? Are you sure you're okay?

SHE

Me!? You're insane!

She practically collapses on the bench, clutching her two bags close to her.

HE

Are you on anything? You're sweating like a...

SHE

I am not sweating!

HE

Then your brain is leaking. You're burning up. Take off your sweater.

SHE

I will not under any circumstances remove my sweater!

HE

And you call me crazy.

SHE

Well, look at you!

HE

This --- is a studied and carefully maintained eccentricity. What's your excuse?

She is vaguely aware of being drawn into what she has almost always managed to avoid. Until now.

SHE

It's undignified.

He is calm. Backs away.

SHE (CONT'D)

(reluctantly)

It's undignified to pull off a pull-over in public.

HE

Try saying that four times. "Pull off a pull-over in public Pull off a pull-over in public" you think lying there on the ground from fainting's dignified?

SHE

(focused)

You realize how vulnerable a person is taking off a sweater like this? Suppose the neck of the sweater gets caught on my chin?

HE

My God, I never thought of that.

SHE

And what about getting past my glasses? And then my entire midsection would be exposed to... Well, and suppose my blouse untucks, which is, you'll admit, entirely possible and suppose...

She presses her hand to her forehead.

HE

Will you take it off for Christsake! You're making me sweat and I'm not usually a sweater. I'm normally a vest and a pair of pants!

She gathers her bags a little closer.

SHE

You ought to put that in the new religion.

HE

What? That one should "never pull off a pull-over". In public?

SHE

That people should not act in public as though they were in private.

HE

Is this the first time you've been out of your apartment? Look around you! Look at me! The New Religion is the common man's religion: AND THE LORD pulled up a chair, opened his beer, and said, "If it itchth, scratcheth it."

SHE

How dare you mock God!

HE

Hey, God's gotta great sense of humor. Ever see an armadillo?

SHE

How do you know about armadillos?

HE

I've watched TV. I've googled.
(demonstrating)
Their shell, or carapace, like the shell of a turtle, only flexible, makes them invulnerable, impervious -- except when challenged -- when they roll up into a ball -- or frightened -- when they jump up and if they land on their backs exposing their soft underbelly -- that's their doom --

He's on his back, arms and legs quivering.

HE (CONT'D)

(with menace)

Their guts flop into their lungs and they drown in their own juices!

She moves between the bags, embracing them close to her body. In doing so, she knocks his phone off the bench. She glances down at it.

She jumps off the bench.

SHE

Oh my God!

She kicks his phone away.

HE

Hey!

SHE

You're recording this!

PLAYBACK - EXT. PARK. DAY.

From a distance and Point of View of He, we see Her, stooping over his phone on the ground.

SHE
That's me! But---

Using his phone, She searches for the camera, which seems to keep away from her until she centers in on its location: inside his cap.

She snatches it, pointing it at Him. He rushes to retrieve his phone.

SHE
Now how do you like it?

HE
(into camera)
Hello America! Hello world! And it's called streaming---

SHE
Pervert!

HE
No-no! I'm a comedian! And look: 1,231 hits and over half of them "like" us.

SHE
There's no "us".

HE
Right. There's just you and me.
(showing her the phone)
But you -- and me -- have 253 friends. 254. 255.... 256...

She stares into the phone.

SHE
"Friends"?

HE
263!

He takes the hat from Her. Then the phone.

HE (CONT'D)
(slyly)
There! I've turned it off.

He slips the hat back on.

EXT. A PARK. DAY.

She has a serious spell of weakness. Retreating to the Bench between her bags.

SHE
I really didn't think it was going
to be this warm today.

HE
(gently patronizing)
Who knew the sun was going to rise?

SHE
(wishfully)
A jacket would have been better.

HE
So you can take off a jacket?

SHE
Jackets have buttons.
(recovered)
Comedian? I'm not laughing.

HE
I didn't say I was any good.

PLAYBACK - EXT. PARK. DAY.

From His POV, She's ensconced between the bags.

She gets up, hugging a bag with each arm.

SHE
I'm going now.

She starts walking away.

HE (O.C.)
Why?

EXT. A PARK. DAY.

She has gotten several yards away. She stops. Turns. Laughs.

HE
Now she laughs.

SHE
You sound as though you actually
believe you've got the right to ask
that question.

HE
I can ask. You don't have to
answer...

SHE
---I won't!

HE
But you have.

SHE
Have I?

HE
Yes.

SHE
How?

HE
By not being gone.

She pivots to go.

HE (CONT'D)
Before you go ---

Her back is to him but she doesn't go.

HE (CONT'D)
At any time during the last...
(checks phone)
---eleven minutes, you could have
just got up and walked away. But
you didn't. You chose to stay...

SHE
---and I'm choosing to leave.
(pause)
Oh! And I haven't in the least
become interested in you.

She pivots.

HE
IS THAT a statement of fact or a
Declaration of Intention?

SHE
BOTH!

HE
(quickly)
Good!

He carefully takes off and folds his cape.

HE (CONT'D)

Because that's the very last thing
in the world I want you to think
about me.... I'm not a comedian.

(hefting the folded cape)

Or this. And all these people?

(into the phone)

They're not our friends. I mean:
they're not your friends. They're
not my friends.

He resignedly sits on the bench, using the cape as a
cushion. He puts on a pair of glasses fashioned from wire,
with the blue bottom of a Noxema jar for one lens and a 7-Up
bottom for the other, staring straight ahead.

She suppresses the slightest of smiles.

HE (CONT'D)

I made this from discarded bits of
glass precisely because they were
discarded. Ah --- everyone is
alternately sick -- and sad --- and
wavy.

He removes the glasses.

PLAYBACK - EXT. PARK. DAY.

A view of the Park, with PEOPLE in the distance around a
fountain.

The view turns to Her.

HE (O.C.)

Well?

She has fixed upon something in the distance.

SHE

(pointing)

I'm watching that Mime over
there---

HE (O.C.)

Where?!

The view frantically searches until it finds a Mime, in the
far distance, plying his trade.

HE (O.C.)

Jeez, I hate mimes.

The view suddenly goes Black.

HE (CONT'D)(O.C.)
I didn't notice. Is it juggling?

SHE (O.C.)
"It"?

HE (O.C.)
I refuse to assign gender to a
mime.

SHE (O.C.)
This one's not juggling.

HE (O.C.)
Good!

EXT. A PARK. DAY.

The darkness is a result of his covering himself with the
cape.

HE
(muffled)
I've got this recurring nightmare:
I'm trapped in a room with a family
of juggling mimes.

SHE
Family? If they have no gender...

He lifts the cape slightly to emphasize the point.

HE
(whistering)
---that's what makes them so
disgusting.

He is back under the cape.

She takes a breath, hugs her bags, and walks away out of the
scene.

HE
(muffled)
When I was a kid me and my buds
used to go to the park and beat 'em
up. I mean really pummel 'em until
they talked. They're never the same
once they've talked....

After a moment he pokes the hat from beneath the cape.

PLAYBACK - EXT. PARK. DAY.

After searching, the mime is found and zoomed in on as it tries to extricate itself from a glass box.

HE (O.C.)
 Jeez, you'd think they'd learn to
 carry a hammer or rock with 'em.

EXT. A PARK. DAY.

In stillness and silence the Park Bench with a big lump in the middle.

HE
 (muffled)
 It IS rather warm today....

She re-enters the scene.

She resolves, placing the bags on the ground, then takes a breath, a look around, and takes off her sweater. After straightening out and picking up her glasses and re-tucking her blouse, she carefully drapes the sweater over the backrest of the Bench.

The hat comes out again.

HE (CONT'D)
 (muffled)
 Is it gone?

SHE
 Yes. It's following some Japanese
 tourists.

PLAYBACK - EXT. PARK. DAY.

A verifying survey confirms that the mime is gone and ends on Her, lingering, then abruptly snaps off.

EXT. A PARK. DAY.

He pulls the hat back under the cape.

HE
 (muffled)
 Go away.

SHE
 What?

HE
 (muffled)
 GO A-WAY!

SHE

Why?

He stands up, keeping the cape around his body except for his head.

HE

Do I have to quote you?

SHE

(profoundly)

I don't think I've ever been quoted.

(with anticipation)

Don't you... Don't you see? Look what you've done for me.

HE

Okay, then. I'll go....

He folds his cape.

SHE

---can ... Can "we" go?

HE

I got nowhere to go.

There is a pause from her, almost joyously embarrassed.

HE (CONT'D)

Don't tell me---

SHE

Okay. I won't.

HE

But...but -- those bags. Your neice...

SHE

---your screen door. Your "new religion".

HE

---silly string?

SHE

I'm not very smart. Or savvy.

HE

(smiling)

---or bearded.

He peels off his beard. He tosses his cape on the bench. They are standing rather close together.

HE (CONT'D)

There's no new religion. And I have doubts about the old one. But I have discovered, and rigorously apply, this principle to Life: To always get what you want: Just never want anything anybody else does.

SHE

Do you want me?

HE

.... Yes.

SHE

But nobody else wants me!

He puts his beard back on, takes up his cape, arranging it around his shoulders then takes up her sweater from the Bench, folds it and hands it to her.

HE

(stoicly)

They will now.

He puts on his glasses and saunters out of the scene.

She remains standing near her bags, sweater in hand. After several moments, Parksters enter and leave the scene.

Eventually, she resolves to place her bags on the Bench and starts to leave but returns, to place the sweater next to the bags. Changes her mind and stuffs it into one of the bags and departs in the direction opposite to his exit.

FADE OUT