

wayne stam

## Was I Just Here?

**THE SETTING:** *A small, quiet, dimly lit den. A stereo is softly playing music suitable for lovemaking. There is a rocking chair in a corner of the room. There are a coffee table and two small end tables around a large, comfortable sofa. On the coffee table are two empty glasses, two album covers, and a few magazines. On the sofa are a MAN and a WOMAN, who appear to be in the early stages of what promises to be a very romantic evening.*

**AT RISE:** *MAN and WOMAN are engaging in a very warm, tender kiss. They may emit some "yummy" sounds (but let's not get carried away). At some moment, when they choose to break, the dialogue may begin.*

WOMAN: Mmmmmmm. . . .

MAN: Was I just here?

WOMAN: Huh? (PAUSE) What?

MAN: Was I just here?

WOMAN: (LAUGHS, PAUSES) Yes. I think that was you.  
(SHE KISSES HIM)

MAN: That was weird! (HE SITS UP STRAIGHTER)

WOMAN: I thought it was rather nice!

MAN: No, no. The kiss was nice. But the moment was really strange.

WOMAN: Should I be offended?

MAN: No. No, not at all. It didn't have anything to do with you.

WOMAN: I should be offended.

MAN: No. Really. I just, uh, it's hard to explain. My mind was really at peace—it's so nice to be alone with you—I was so comfortable that all my defenses—my inhibitions—had slipped away. The whole world was gone except for you and me.

WOMAN: That's *nice*! I don't think that's so weird.

MAN: That's not the weird part. . . Sometimes when I feel at peace. . . really at peace. . . oh, I don't know, am I making any sense?

WOMAN: I think I'm still back at "was I just here?"

MAN: In that instant, just before I said that, didn't you notice anything? Something different about me? Maybe a long moment of nothingness? (PAUSE) Yeah! Maybe when I perceived I was here, you couldn't! Didn't you notice *anything*?

WOMAN: Well, let me see. . . You know, your tongue sort of. . . (SHE THINKS BETTER OF CONTINUING) No. Nothing unusual.

MAN: I don't mean that. (PAUSE) I, uh, guess you think I'm just zoning out on you. I'm sorry. It's just that somehow, right now, in this moment, this finite, tiny piece of time, this seems so important. (HE WAITS FOR A REACTION, GETS NONE) I'm not talking about a fleeting thought here. I mean, I'm talking about me. The real me. The pure essence of me. I was just here, wasn't I? Really here. All here. (WAITS AGAIN, NO REACTION) Do you follow any of this, or do you think I'm nuts?

WOMAN: No, you're not nuts. I really don't have any idea what you're talking about, but you're not nuts. You're probably just very tired, and as you say "at peace". . . That *is* a very strange and beautiful feeling. Sometimes I almost forget what it's like to experience a truly peaceful moment. (KISSES HIM AGAIN. A LONG, GENTLE KISS) Mmmmmm. . . That's what I call

peace. . . And I'm *sure* you were just here.

MAN: (AFTER A LONG MOMENT OF NO RESPONSE) Have you ever had an "out of body experience?"

WOMAN: (A BIT PERTURBED) Is this a dirty joke?

MAN: (OBLIVIOUS TO HER) I don't know much about them, but I think this has something to do with them.

WOMAN: Dirty jokes?

MAN: No. Out of body experiences. Do you know what they are? (SHE SHRUGS) Maybe you've had one and you didn't realize. . . I'm not even sure myself, but I think it's the feeling of *watching* your own experience, even being able to leave it. Almost like a non-participant.

WOMAN: You mean like monitoring yourself—being overly self-conscious?

MAN: No. No, that *is* just being self-conscious. Seeing your own actions, but from your own viewpoint. What I mean is. . . well, feeling like *you*, the real essence of you, your conscious mind, leaves your body and observes you, well, whatever's left, from above—or from another viewpoint. (PAUSE) I'm not saying this very well, am I?

WOMAN: Now I'm beginning to think you're nuts! (SHE LAUGHS AND KISSES HIM) No, actually, I think I have felt what you're describing a few times. At least to some degree.

MAN: It is distinctly different from just being self-conscious, though. It feels a little like "deja vu," only it's relative to the present. There's a definite sensation of detachment.

WOMAN: Well, I think I know what you mean, but I think you have to realize that the "real essence"

you're talking about was real and really there before you sensed it. So where does "was I just here?" come in?

MAN: Hmmm. You've got me there. I think it's got something to do with intensity. Or focus. Or density of self-perception.

WOMAN: Density of self-perception? Listen to you! Since when are you so philosophical?

MAN: Gee, I don't know. Is this philosophy? I'm really just trying to define. . . to understand what I think I just experienced.

WOMAN: (MOCK-SERIOUSLY) Hmmm. . . zounds like vilozophy to me.

MAN: I guess so. Sartre?

WOMAN: No. s'philosophy! (SHE KISSES HIM AGAIN. HE STILL LOOKS LOST) Hey! Are you okay?

MAN: (COMING BACK TO HER) Oh. Yeah. Really. Yes, I'm fine. I just don't. . . (HE REALIZES HOW LONG THIS HAS BEEN GOING ON. HE SMILES AND KISSES HER) You know, you're pretty terrific to put up with me.

WOMAN: You're not bad yourself.

MAN: No, I mean it. You're really a very special lady. (HE KISSES HER ON THE CHEEK)

WOMAN: Gee whiz, do you really mean it? (SHE LAUGHS AND HUGS HIM) Thanks. You're right. I am special. Has anyone ever told you, you have incredibly good taste in women?

MAN: Yes, all my women tell me that.

WOMAN: I see. Where do you keep "all your women"?

MAN: Mostly, I "keep" them at the "Y." It's so much cheaper than the Bonaventure.

WOMAN: Hmmm. . . Dom Perignon taste and a Ripple budget. And a philosopher, too. (DRAMATICALLY) Come and let me kiss the three of you! (ANOTHER GENTLE KISS. HE BREAKS AWAY, GONE AGAIN.) Don't tell me. You were just here again.

MAN: No.

WOMAN: Then who was it this time?

MAN: No, no. It didn't happen again. I just can't get it off of my mind. What happened before.

WOMAN: I'm beginning to think it's going to be on my mind for awhile, too.

MAN: I know what part of it is. You know how most of the time we just do things naturally. Our life is planned. Preprogrammed. We almost automatically do what we have programmed ourselves to do. We aren't really involved. Everything is so, well. . .

WOMAN: Impersonal? Unreal? Automatic?

MAN: Yes! Everything! We're just machines. We program ourselves when we wake up in the morning, and decisions we *think* we make are made along printed circuits in our brains. We hardly participate. . . *And*. . . I think the reason we so rarely feel our own true essence is because we let it sleep almost all the time.

WOMAN: I don't agree with that at all. You make it sound like we're all zombies blindly following some master plan. Personally, I think I *do* actively participate in my own life. For example, I think I want to kiss you! (SHE KISSES HIM SOMEWHAT ARROGANTLY)

MAN: (BREAKING AWAY) Aha! Yes! But *why* did you kiss me just now?

WOMAN: I take back what I said before about you not

being nuts.

MAN: No, really. I think you kissed me just then because at this time of day, in this setting, at this moment in our relationship, our interaction—it's practically automatic. Now, if you kissed me while you were, let's say, performing brain surgery—that would be more of a conscious, personal decision.

WOMAN: I would kiss you a lot less often that way, that's for sure. Might be fun "scrubbing up" for a kiss, though. (PAUSES) Come to think of it, though, that's an interesting visual picture. Are you the patient? If you are, then maybe you could leave your "patient" body, I could leave my "surgeon" body, and we could meet someplace.

MAN: You're making fun of me.

WOMAN: You're just such a fun kinda guy!

MAN: Stop it! (PAUSE) Look, I know I spoiled the mood, but—

WOMAN: Not yet, you haven't! (SHE STARTS TO KISS HIM AGAIN)

MAN: (STRUGGLING AWAY) Mmmmmmm! (HE STANDS UP, WALKS A FEW STEPS AWAY, WITH HIS HANDS FORMING A "T") Time out! Hold it just a second. Okay. Now, a few minutes ago, in this room, you and I were alone. And then I distinctly felt another entity in the room. Was it another "me?"

WOMAN: (AFTER A SHORT PAUSE, AS IF SHE'S AFRAID SHE'S OPENING A CAN OF WORMS) Maybe it was God?

MAN: (THOUGHTFUL, BUT SKEPTICAL) Hmmm, I suppose that's possible.

WOMAN: If it seemed like it was you, maybe that has

something to do with your being created in the image and likeness of God.

- MAN: I really can't see God as being that short. Besides, I don't think he'd pick this particular image and likeness to emulate. (PAUSE) Although, it is some kind of image I can't quite grasp. It seems to disappear as soon as I try to focus on it. The more I think about it, the less clear it becomes.
- WOMAN: Now it *really* sounds like philosophy!
- MAN: I'm convinced it's me. The part of me that lived before my body and the part that will continue on forever.
- WOMAN: I'm sure there's a joke here somewhere, but I won't try it.
- MAN: My soul. Or my essence. Maybe my consciousness. . . .
- WOMAN: Maybe your imagination. . . .
- MAN: Yeah, maybe it is just my imagination. But still, I think it's something more. (PAUSE) Why don't we get reee-el comfortable again. Maybe it'll come back, whatever it is. (THEY BEGIN TO KISS AGAIN. AFTER AWHILE, HE BREAKS AWAY AGAIN) WAIT! STOP! DON'T GO! Who are you? What are you? (HE RISES)
- WOMAN: (TO "IT") And why are you picking on *me*? (TO MAN) Maybe it's the "essence" of my old boyfriend.
- MAN: It's gone again. (HE TURNS AND COMES BACK TO HER) Oh, I'm sorry, honey. This must be frustrating for you.
- WOMAN: Well, it's not too frustrating, but it does have me scared.
- MAN: Why?

- WOMAN: You never called me "honey" before. I hate that! Couldn't you call me "baby", "gorgeous", "sweetheart", or even "toots?"
- MAN: Toots? Forget it. . . Damn it, that's frustrating. I just wish I could catch it, whatever "it" is, long enough to understand it. I'm sure if I could just figure it out, I could use this feeling. Like a tool. But I just can't seem to hold onto the image. Maybe it's getting more accessible, though. It never happened twice in one night before.
- WOMAN: Is this where you tell me I'm a great kisser?
- MAN: (PAUSE) Do you realize I just had two glimpses of *me*. Or the spirit of me. Or maybe really a look at God.
- WOMAN: Don't make any deals with visions of God. I saw *Love and Death*. "Ivan, what happened?" "I got screwed!" Besides, how can it be God? I thought you said you felt like you watched through "it's" eyes. I'm confused again.
- MAN: Me, too. I guess maybe I'll never understand what this is all about. Or maybe one day it'll all just click into place and I'll just know.
- WOMAN: (SINGING) "I'll know when my love comes along. I'll know there and then. I'll know—"
- MAN: All right. All right. I'll stop. (SHE LOOKS SKEPTICAL) Really. Here. I'll prove it to you. (HE GRABS HER AND KISSES HER. SHE MAKES A YUMMY SOUND OR TWO, AND THEY RESUME KISSING. THIS TIME WHEN THEY STOP, SHE HAS A DAZED EXPRESSION ON HER FACE. SHE HOLDS IT FOR AT LEAST TEN SECONDS) Babe? Are you okay? . . . Gorgeous? . . . Sweetheart? . . . Toots? . . . (STILL NO RESPONSE) Here goes. . . HONEY?
- WOMAN: What a bizarre night!

- MAN: I know. I'm sorry. Come on, let me make it up to you. (HE STARTS TO KISS HER)
- WOMAN: No, wait a minute. Just now, I felt something really peculiar.
- MAN: Oh my God! It's an epidemic! (HE LOOKS AT THE EMPTY GLASSES ON THE COFFEE TABLE) Maybe we got a bad batch of Seven-up.
- WOMAN: No! This was real. I think. No! I'm sure this was not a hallucination and it was not my imagination. I *know* that I left my body, like you said.
- MAN: Cute. I get it. Show me how stupid I looked. Okay. I get your message.
- WOMAN: No! I'm serious! I really felt. . . removed. . . separate. I watched us kiss. Like a non-participant.
- MAN: Oh, you participated all right.
- WOMAN: I don't think I can describe it. I felt like I was the eye of a camera in a tiny Goodyear blimp, floating around the room, seeing everything. It was like I was watching a film. I don't know if I'd describe this the same way you described what you felt, but I. . . maybe it wasn't even the same thing. But it *was* real. My mind, or something, was really separate from my body.
- MAN: Are you sure you're not just imagining things? We have talked about this far too long, and, of course, we're very tired, and. . .
- WOMAN: Wait a minute! Don't make this seem like nothing. It's very important. If we could understand it, it might be the most important thing that's ever happened to us! Like you said before, maybe the rest of our time is spent on unreal, unimportant things. I know something about this experience is more real, more important than. . . (SHE TRAILS OFF)

MAN: All right. All right. Don't get upset. I understand. *Believe me*, I understand. Look, I know it's important, but we're not getting anywhere.

WOMAN: You're right. For once. I guess maybe we'll never know, or understand. . . And the more I think about it, the more confused I get.

MAN: Me too. Let's think about something else. (THEY START TO KISS AGAIN. THEY ARE IN EXACTLY THE SAME POSITION AS IN THE OPENING. AFTER AWHILE, COMPARABLE TO THE OPENING, VOICES CAN BE HEARD BY THE AUDIENCE, BUT NOT BY MAN AND WOMAN. THEY ARE THEIR OWN VOICES)

WOMAN'S VOICE: Look at that!

MAN'S VOICE: Yeah. . .

WOMAN'S VOICE: Huh! Physical manifestations of spiritual and emotional bonds.

MAN'S VOICE: It's kissing.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Shall we break it up?

MAN'S VOICE: Again? No. That would be cruel. Besides, he almost recognized me the last time.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Don't they look cute? Are they really just ashes?

MAN'S VOICE: Dust.

WOMAN'S VOICE: I thought it was ashes.

MAN'S VOICE: They do seem almost real don't they?

WOMAN'S VOICE: What do you mean by "real"?

MAN'S VOICE: I'm not sure. Never mind.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Look at that!

MAN'S VOICE: Yeah. . .

WOMAN'S VOICE: Should we follow their lead?

MAN'S VOICE: I thought you'd never ask!

(MAN AND WOMAN HAVE CONTINUED THEIR ACTIVITY, OB-  
LIVIOUS TO THE VOICES. THERE ARE NOW TWO SETS OF  
YUMMY SOUNDS AS THE LIGHTS FADE TO OUR PERCEPTION  
OF BLACK)

CURTAIN