

The Man Who Became Sand

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A version of the play was first produced by Texas Tech University Theatre

Dramatis Personae

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

A man who becomes sand.

STRANGER

A mysterious stranger who wanders the desert.

CHORUS

At least four people who are the winds.

The sound of wind blowing an endless desert of sand. THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND walks onto the hot stage, meandering as if he has been walking for days. His feet drag, his movement is lumbered, he is covered in sweat. If possible, the audience should begin to sweat, regardless of the temperature of the room, while watching this painful scene.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Fffa. Fffa-a. Fff... uh.

He drops to the ground. This is accompanied by the sound of a sandbag hitting the floor which should be produced live.

CHORUS

Lost for years and lost for days/He wanders without end/His hands are chapped from sun and sand/His lips are dry as earth. Banished from the land he loved/Banished forever, forever/Here he lays, the former prince/refusing to believe the lie/His father's love, his mother's death/refusing to believe the lie. Arise gentle prince from your wandering slumber/Arise for the town is just over the next dune/Salvation is not lost for you/The truth can yet be found.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Years!

He struggles to his feet.

Years have I been here. Here in this desert. I have wandered for years and nothing has changed. The dune here appears as the twin of the dune a month before. The plant with water here the same as every other.

He coughs.

The mirage here the same as every other mirage: a disappointment.

He coughs.

Years!

He drops to his knees.

My mother is dead. My father: her killer. Love? Oh, yes, “love” is all around me. It is preferable to the love my father bestowed after he killed my mother. How? He did not stab her in the neck, so that her life blood would fall to the ground along with her life. No. He did not aim the gun and pull the trigger. No. Too much the coward for direct confrontation, my father. No, my father poisoned mother with her morning drink.

He coughs.

It has been years since then! I still remember her body, her beautiful hands, her beautiful hair, being lowered into the earth. And then the love, of my father. His yearning to forget his mistake: his loss. It was not to be.

He struggles to his feet.

I could see the truth in his eyes. The truth the preacher could not know. I saw the deeds of my father’s own black heart and knew that something must be done. After years of my frightened tears had gathered upon my mother’s grave the weeds began to grow, to spring up from the earth.

Removing the cloth covering his face.

My father’s secret would be known! I would be the one to tell it! But my words were treated as if they had not been spoken. The people retreated to their homes as if they had not seen me on the street. Word had made way to my father.

Re-covering his face.

I was given my fill of liquor and, flailing, thrown into the streets with a mask covering my face to obscure my sight and a knife strapped to my hand. Stumbling on the brick in the crowded alleyway on an evening of celebration. I killed seven people: they said. I was banished after a week in prison and two days of public humiliation. My younger brother would now be next to rule.

He begins walking again.

And I? ... I would become sand.

He faints. Again the sound of a sandbag hitting the stage.

CHORUS

His banishment left no room for doubt/He was an outcast and so he had been cast out/Loss of mother, father, brother, and all else/He wanders now for life. His dreams

have made faces of those he slew in a rage/The knife he used to kill is strapped at his side/His dreams offer escape from his life in the sand/But hold only shattered pasts and faces he never met.

Enter the STRANGER. This stranger wanders the desert as lifestyle, though it started as a hobby.

STRANGER

King?

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Fffa. Fffa-a. Fff... uh.

STRANGER

Who likes to look at the likes of you? I've got an answer in my pocket, but first: you'll have to tell me your name.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

What?

STRANGER

What! Pleased.

The STRANGER offers his hand in sigh of solidarity. THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND takes the hand eagerly.

And so, as promised: my pocket!

The STRANGER reaches into his pocket and removes a skin full of water.

The nectar of life, as they say. Or, rather, as they say in a place like this. A place where life itself is dependent upon a nectar as un-sweet and un-nectary such as this. What? Water?

STRANGER offers MAN water.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Sitting up. Drinking furiously.

Who? You've come to bring me back?

STRANGER

Just call me stranger. Your cracked lips and dry skin provide happiness for the water, for it is able to do its work. Perhaps the color of your lips will be restored. The skin, again, coerced to glow.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Where are you from?

STRANGER

This lovely desert.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

And what exactly is so lovely about it?

STRANGER

The color palate?

MAN looks at him.

It's a desert joke.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

I haven't been doing a great deal of laughing lately.

STRANGER

And why is that?

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

I like this game. I'll give you one guess.

STRANGER

Umm. Your throat was dry.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Well, that is a part of it.

MAN smiles, his lips crack, he winces in pain.

STRANGER

Not quite ready for the smile yet, huh? Dry lips are the worst. I've simply nothing for that though, save the water. Here, let me help you to your feet.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Thanks.

He is stood up.

Why?

STRANGER

I'll see you again sometime. Nice to meet you, what. Nice to meet you.

Stranger walks off-stage. MAN follows him with his eyes off into the distance during the next choral speech.

CHORUS

The STRANGER visited him only briefly in the desert, and left the way he came/No one knows where he went to/No one knows where he came from. The dune in the other direction leads to salvation. The other dune! Do not, dear prince, follow the path of the STRANGER/Do not be lead astray! Follow his path not with your eyes, nor set in your mind. Your path is towards life itself, not death. Not death.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Stop!

He is calling after the stranger.

Stop! Please! I need to know where you are going! Where have you come from! Dear STRANGER, please!

He waves furiously. The STRANGER does not see or hear him [or chooses not to].

Alas. Didn't he know me?

The winds sound harsh. The sun is setting.

How am I to live now? The cold comes soon. As soon as the shadow is cast upon me and the dune hides the sun's light. The cool I long for during the day is granted only when it is the heat I need. The heat is longed for during the night. The sands are no match for the wind's cold fingers whispering through their grains.

He coughs.

Can I hide from death another night? Can the red sun part from me once more? Can the cool moon yet again accompany me to slumber? Will the yellow and orange sunrise greet me again? My mind and heart are in agreement. They both tell me "no."

MAN traces his toes across the ground, feeling in his mind each grain of sand in the desert.

CHORUS

Do not part from us dear prince/Our lives have been alone without you/The breeze which passes your cheek by day and your sand-worn feet by night are your constant companions. Have you not noticed us these many years? Constant companions have we been. Constant in joy and sorry/Constant in light and dark/More constant than your sun and moon/More constant than your heat and cold/More constant than the thought of death or the agony of life. Dear prince. Do not leave us.

CHORUS1

I'm sorry you feel you should go.

CHORUS2

The heart is not always so certain.

CHORUS3

The mind plays tricks dear prince.

CHORUS4

The cost need not be your life.

CHORUS1

If silly games have been played, we are sorry.

CHORUS2

We would never trifle with your life.

CHORUS3

I remember meeting you, that day.

CHORUS4

Your face does look different.

CHORUS3

We love you for your company.

CHORUS2

Family. That is what you are to us.

CHORUS1

If you were to go away... we just...

CHORUS4

There has never been anyone who stayed
as long as you.

THE MAN WHO BECAME SAND

Journey is not for all. Destination can appear as journey. I have found my final resting place. I have found my home. I have found my mother. This is the spot. It is here I must remain.

The man becomes sand.

Sound of a sandbag hitting the ground.

Sound of sand spreading across the floor.

Sound of the wind.

A brief moment of reflection before...

END OF PLAY