

The Bête Goes Noire

by

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DESCRIPTION

Charon the Boatman will show up in the strangest places these days.

CHARACTERS

- DRIVER, husky—must be physically larger than HUSBAND; also, dressed in filthy clothes, which contrasts with his manner of speaking
- WIFE
- HUSBAND

SETTING

Front seat of a tow truck; outside the tow truck, in the yard: DRIVER on stage left, HUSBAND in middle, WIFE on stage right.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Three chairs
- A tire iron
- Set of car keys

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Lights up on DRIVER in the driver's seat of the tow truck. WIFE and HUSBAND stand outside. WIFE looks angry, HUSBAND glum. A tire iron is on the front seat, passenger side.

DRIVER

You have to get in, ma'am, sir, before we can get going to get your car. It's not a pleasure boat—

WIFE

It's a fucking tow truck—

DRIVER

But it will get you across the river, to your car, and reliably so.

A hesitation, then HUSBAND goes to get inside.

DRIVER

Wait—let me move this—most assuredly it will not be a comfortable ride if you have to sit on this.

DRIVER takes the tire iron and puts against the chair legs.

DRIVER

Now I believe that you will be much more comfortable.

HUSBAND slides in. WIFE, face crunched in disdain, gets in and closes the door. DRIVER pulls away, and there is a long pause as they drive in silence. Then, suddenly, DRIVER jams on the brakes.

DRIVER

(gestures)

Look at that! A little more tilt on that left-hand turn of his, and he'd be off the bridge and into the river. Some people are not very considerate, wouldn't you agree?

WIFE does not respond, though HUSBAND looks like he wants to. DRIVER looks at both of them, sees his conversational gambit is ignored, puts the truck in gear, and moves forward. More silence.

HUSBAND

It was dangerous—

WIFE

Don't you dare.

HUSBAND

What?

WIFE

Talk to him.

HUSBAND

Well, it was—

WIFE

Just—don't!

Long beat.

HUSBAND
(to DRIVER)

I'm sorry—

WIFE

Traitor!

DRIVER

Ma'am, I can appreciate—

HUSBAND

I'm just—

WIFE

Just both of you shut up—

DRIVER

No one ever likes it—

HUSBAND

The sign on the street was a little ambiguous—

DRIVER

—but it's not my fault.

HUSBAND

But it was—

WIFE gives DRIVER the finger.

HUSBAND

Now I'm really sorry—

WIFE

Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry—

DRIVER

It's not my fault, ma'am—I just do what the law says—

WIFE

(in a Germanish accent)

Just following your orders! Achtung!

HUSBAND

She doesn't really mean—

WIFE

(to HUSBAND)

Oh, shut up. Shut up.

(to DRIVER)

I do mean it—thief. Pig dog. You invaded our lives! And we get to pay you a hundred and fifty dollars for the pleasure, for the privilege, of riding in this filthy “pleasure boat”—and of course the cops have to get their cut—forty-four fucking dollars to the powers that be!

(to HUSBAND)

You have a spine like salt-water taffy.

Long beat.

DRIVER

You have a misunderstanding of the chain of events.

Sharp look from WIFE.

WIFE

What?

DRIVER

It sounds like you think we go around hunting.

HUSBAND

They really don't.

DRIVER

No, we don't.

HUSBAND

I didn't think so.

DRIVER

We don't want to divest people of their means of transportation.

(to HUSBAND)

I appreciate your understanding. Life is hard enough as it is without being divested of a means of transportation.

WIFE

You talk like a dead man.

DRIVER

We just provide a service for when people do not follow the law.

WIFE

Talk with no sense.

HUSBAND

Please—

DRIVER

You have to agree that the laws are there and we have to follow them—if people placed themselves just anywhere—

WIFE

It was in front of our house—

DRIVER

Not technically—

HUSBAND

Not technically—

DRIVER

You were on the other side, technically in the loading zone—

WIFE

Of a building that is mostly abandoned and hasn't used that loading zone for the year we've been there.

DRIVER

Well, yesterday, they did—it's the technicalities that will get you every time. We have to observe the technicalities or, well, or else.

HUSBAND

But the signs on the street were ambiguous.

DRIVER

Ambiguity—never an excuse.

HUSBAND

That's not true—

DRIVER

Otherwise—

WIFE

Otherwise that little Mussolini's world falls down.

DRIVER

You can also contest it in court.

WIFE

And I am sure justice reigns supreme there!

DRIVER comes to a stop. DRIVER looks steadily at WIFE.

DRIVER

People like you do not like to think that they have to follow the rules.

HUSBAND

Wait a second—

DRIVER

(ignoring HUSBAND)

It's a gift to bring people across that river to make them see that such a thing as not following the rules—

HUSBAND

We follow the rules!

DRIVER

(still ignoring HUSBAND)

That not following the rules is something that cannot be practiced for very long without some correction coming to that frame of mind.

Long beat.

HUSBAND

What did you just say?

DRIVER ignores him and gets out of the truck.

HUSBAND

What did you just say to my wife?

DRIVER

This is the tow lot—you'll find it back in there. And don't mind dog barking—it's been tucked away—for now.

HUSBAND and WIFE look at each other.

WIFE

Don't you know where you put it?

DRIVER

Ma'am, a lot of things that are broken get put in there. We put them in, ma'am, as we get them—there is no valet. Ma'am. Now—get out of the truck and go find it. Please.

HUSBAND and WIFE sidle out of the car, looking suddenly quite uncomfortable. WIFE's brazenness is gone, and HUSBAND has a stunned look on his face.

DRIVER

Go on.

WIFE

Did you bring the keys?

HUSBAND

I did.

WIFE

Don't you go without me!

HUSBAND is not paying full attention to her.

WIFE

What?

DRIVER

Do you have any questions?

HUSBAND
The sign on the street was ambiguous—

DRIVER
I don't care.

HUSBAND
It never said—

DRIVER
I don't care.

HUSBAND
It never said directly—

DRIVER
Not my concern

HUSBAND
We are not criminals.

DRIVER
I have not brought you here to discuss what kind of criminals you might be. I just want you to get what is yours and cross back over the river.

Long beat.

HUSBAND
You get it.

WIFE
What?

HUSBAND
I want him to go and get it.

WIFE
You can't—

HUSBAND
He took it, he put it there, he should get it.

WIFE

Just go get it—

HUSBAND digs out his car keys and throws them at DRIVER. They bounce off him to the ground.

HUSBAND

Now.

DRIVER digs at the keys with the toe of his shoe but does not pick them up.

DRIVER

I ferry people across to the tow lot—I don't move them around when I get them here.

HUSBAND

Get. Our.—

DRIVER

Of course not.

HUSBAND hesitates, then bolts for the truck and pulls out the tire iron. DRIVER, anticipating this, catches the iron as HUSBAND swings it and easily forces it out of HUSBAND's hands. But HUSBAND, in a surprise move, knees or kicks DRIVER in the crotch, which drops DRIVER to the ground. HUSBAND grabs the tire iron and raises it over his head to strike. During all of this, WIFE ineffectually tries to interfere—vocal and physical ad lib of reactions is fine. DRIVER, oddly, does not really defend himself.

HUSBAND

(with tire iron raised)

We are not criminals! We are not criminals!

WIFE goes to HUSBAND, but when she touches him, he shrinks from her, almost swinging the iron against her.

DRIVER

Do you hear it?

HUSBAND

What?

DRIVER

The barking of the beast.

We follow the rules!
We follow the rules!

HUSBAND
(to WIFE)

You don't want to—

WIFE

But he does.
Don't you?

DRIVER
(to HUSBAND)

HUSBAND, looking both befuddled and enraged, looks from DRIVER to WIFE and back again.

Don't you?

DRIVER

Long beat. DRIVER looks at WIFE.

Spit it out.

DRIVER

WIFE looks confused, then an odd look of realization and surprise comes over her face.

Go ahead.

DRIVER

WIFE spits out a coin.

Good.
Good.
Do you hear the barking of the beast?

DRIVER
(holds up the coin)
(to HUSBAND)

Long beat.

Yes. Yes.

HUSBAND

With an abrupt movement, HUSBAND hits himself in the knee or shin with the tire iron, dropping himself and the tire iron to the ground. WIFE goes to him. DRIVER gets up, picks up the tire iron, pockets the coin. He also either picks up the keys and throws them to WIFE or kicks them to WIFE.

DRIVER
(to WIFE)

You should take him home. And as for you—I am sure that justice for you will reign supreme.

Lights fade to black as DRIVER, holding tire iron, looks at them both, with the sound of a fierce barking dog filling the air.

