

# fertile

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BYRON        mid 40's

MEREDITH    mid 40's

JANINE      late 50's - early 60's

FREEDOM     early 20's

Time:  
Present

Place:  
Eugene, Oregon

FERTILEScene 10:SETTING:

Laurel Hill Valley in Eugene, Oregon. A vast slope of a barren crop farm. We see stretches of dirt with the occasional dead skeletal remains of once plentiful grapevines. Beyond this are the green and lush vineyards of neighboring farms. It is obvious that this particular piece of land has been cursed somehow. Bits of a broken fence and old, rusty farm equipment are scattered about. Dry. Neglected. Abandoned.

AT RISE:

Afternoon. Bright and unbearable. The sun is ruthless. Deadly silent. No birds. Not even the wind. In walks FREEDOM, early twenties. She wears nothing but a tattered hospital gown, unkempt from head to foot. She is a desperate savage reduced to a sickly pallor. She walks across the field ready to collapse. Most importantly, wrapped around her chest with a makeshift swaddling cloth is her dead newborn. She finds a suitable spot and falls to her knees. Weak and exhausted, she begins to slowly dig a hole. Deep within the ground, she comes across a white teddy bear, now soiled and worm-eaten. As if she were expecting this, she removes it with tender affection and sets it aside. She then unties the cloth from her shoulder and places her child into the hole. As she buries it, she quietly recites Psalm 23 with some difficulty. Some lines are paraphrased, but the important phrases are spoken with utmost seriousness. Once the task is done, she places the battered teddy bear on top of the mound as a grave marker.

FREEDOM

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust...

(She tries to stand, but falls. She tries again. Barely holding herself up with weak legs, FREEDOM looks up to the sun. She stretches her arms to the heavens)

FREEDOM (continued)

Me next. Pretty please. Me next.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 9:

AT RISE: The dead of night. The scene is the same as before but with no teddy bear. Sitting on the ground with legs crossed is BYRON. He is mid-40's, wearing jeans and hoodie, looking rather anxious. He holds a flashlight, switched off. He thinks he hears something and turns on the flashlight. He calls out in a loud whisper.

BYRON

Freedom?

(Nothing. A false alarm. He turns off the light and resumes sitting quietly. After a beat, he once again switches the light on and wanders to one side of the field.)

BYRON (continued)

Are you there? Goddamn it, show yourself.

(waits)

Freedom!

(Just then, a porch light from the farmhouse illuminates the field in a beam of orange glow. BYRON turns suddenly, caught. He switches the flashlight off but doesn't attempt to hide. JANINE enters. She is late 50's to early 60's, dressed in pajamas and robe. She too has a flashlight, aimed directly at BYRON.)

JANINE

Get off my property. I'm not going to tell you again.

BYRON

I had to come.

JANINE

Did you hear what I said? Get off my property.

BYRON

Listen, I have a feeling this time-

JANINE

I don't give a shit. You're trespassing.

BYRON

Tonight's the night. You'll see.

JANINE

You want me to call the cops?

BYRON

She'll come. I swear.

JANINE

That's what you said the last time. And the time before that. This whole thing, this crazy notion of yours, it's-

BYRON

I want to fix this.

JANINE

There's nothing to fix. Go home.

BYRON

I don't have a home.

JANINE

That's too bad for you. I will not be a part of this any longer. This is psychotic behavior. I could have you arrested for stalking.

(BYRON quickly turns around, switches his light on and points off to the distance)

BYRON

Freedom!

JANINE

Will you shut up?

BYRON

She's out there somewhere.

JANINE

She's in your head, Byron. That's all.

BYRON

She needs you. She's sick. She's pregnant.

JANINE

Then why hasn't she shown up already? Huh? If she's so desperate? I'm the one with an address, not her. I'm not that difficult to find.

BYRON

Now you're not.

JANINE

(pause)

You have ten seconds. One-

(As JANINE continues to count down, BYRON speaks over her)

BYRON

Or else what? You'll punish me? Go ahead. Call the cops. Well I've got news for you, Janine. You've got nothing to take away from me. This is all I have left. My body. My worthless self.

(JANINE finishes her counting)

JANINE

You just dug yourself a grave.

(exits)

BYRON

Then kill me.

(In a flash of anger, BYRON flings his flashlight across the empty field. He is now lost. He falls to his knees and plops face down in the dirt. The light from the house goes out, and BYRON is left under the wash of the moon's glow. BYRON scoops up a small handful of dirt and tries to nibble at it. It disgusts him. He immediately spits it out, trying to get all remnants of it off his tongue, using his shirtsleeve. FREEDOM now appears in the background. She is nine months pregnant, still sickly looking. Although her clothes are filthy and threadbare, she appears peaceful with a magical aura about her.)

FREEDOM

You're in the wrong spot.

(BYRON turns quickly around, but does not run towards her. Instead he delicately keep his distance so as not to frighten her away like a skittish deer.)

BYRON

Free.

FREEDOM

That stuff is much too dark. You need to dig deep. Closer to the vines.

BYRON

You don't know how worried I've been.

FREEDOM

I've tried other soils, same region. Not the same.

BYRON

Don't move.

FREEDOM

There's something about this land that's so... appetizing.

BYRON

There's someone I want you to meet, OK?

FREEDOM

It's opus 90, by the way. B 166. Dumky.

BYRON

What?

FREEDOM

I've come back.

BYRON

Good. Stay where you are.

(FREEDOM finds a spot near the dead grapevines and starts digging)

FREEDOM

It's where she stood that makes the difference. Here. Here is where she must have bled from her arms during the caning.

BYRON

Are you still doing that?



FREEDOM

I need it.

BYRON

Freedom, stop that.

FREEDOM

I'm hungry, Byron.

BYRON

Come inside. This lady here will feed you.

FREEDOM

You don't understand. It's for the baby.

BYRON

You'll harm the baby if you do that.

FREEDOM

It's good, Byron. Have some. Take communion with me.

(FREEDOM finds a lump of dirt to her liking and eats it)

BYRON

Stop that!

(BYRON runs to her and pushes the dirt from her hands)

FREEDOM

Byron, no!

BYRON

It's not healthy, honey.

FREEDOM

Honey is what you call a loved one.

BYRON

Don't you think I do? Why have I been out here night after night like some sheep dog?

FREEDOM

Let me have something to eat and I'll go.

BYRON

Please, please don't put dirt in your mouth.

FREEDOM

Smell it. On my hands. Isn't it wonderful?

(FREEDOM offers her hands to him. BYRON leans in and smells, then buries his face in her palms, shaking his head in despair)

BYRON

No. It doesn't. It's dirt.

FREEDOM

Leave me alone.

(FREEDOM continues to dig for more)

BYRON

Don't do this, Free.

FREEDOM

And here is where she must have stood while plucking off the grapes at harvest.

BYRON

She's here now, Freedom. In that house. Let me show you.

FREEDOM

This will be enough. The taste of soles from her feet. Firmly planted. Strong. Defiant. Ready to bloom again. Just the way I want my child to be.

(FREEDOM now grabs fistfuls. BYRON fights her by grabbing onto her wrists)

BYRON

It's making you anemic. You'll die.

FREEDOM

You die!

(She pushes the dirt in his face. This pisses him off. BYRON tries to wrestle her down without causing any harm to her swollen abdomen.)

BYRON

I'm doing this for you, goddamn it. I want you well again. I want you whole.

FREEDOM

Help! Someone!

(The porch light comes on again. BYRON releases his grip over FREEDOM and falls away from her.)

BYRON

Shit. Are you OK?

(FREEDOM gets up and tries to run away. He immediately grabs her by the arm. She is so weak at this point, she is unable to escape his grip. JANINE once again appears with her flashlight)

JANINE

What. The fuck.

BYRON

(whispers to FREEDOM)

Look. Look, honey. See? Look who it is.

(BYRON holds FREEDOM from behind by the shoulders and presents her to JANINE. JANINE shines the light in her face. BYRON kisses FREEDOM's neck and whispers into her ear)

BYRON (continued)

It's your mother. Just like I promised.

FREEDOM

(calmly)

Let go of me. And please... Do you mind turning that off? You're blinding me.

(BYRON lets go of his hold on her as JANINE turns off the flashlight. FREEDOM falls to her knees)

BYRON

Janine-

JANINE

That's enough, Byron.

(JANINE approaches FREEDOM but keeps some distance between them. She tries to look at FREEDOM's face which is now hung low)

JANINE (continued)

Are you Nicole?

FREEDOM

My name's Freedom.

JANINE

(pause)

This is not my daughter.

BYRON

What?

JANINE

I don't know who you think she is, but she sure doesn't belong to me.

BYRON

Impossible.

JANINE

Who do you think I am, dear?

FREEDOM

What?

JANINE

Look at me. You think I'm your mother?

(FREEDOM raises her head and stares into JANINE's face)

FREEDOM

My mother's dead.

JANINE

This gentlemen doesn't seem to think so.

BYRON

Freedom, think. This woman lives here. This is her house. You were raised here.

FREEDOM

I came for the dirt.

JANINE

Excuse me?

FREEDOM

You have the kind I can't get anywhere else.

JANINE

What's she talking about?

BYRON

She thinks she can-

FREEDOM

I eat it.

JANINE

God.

BYRON

Janine, this is your daughter. She needs your help.

JANINE

I had a daughter once, but not... this.

BYRON

Freedom, don't you recognize her?

(FREEDOM shakes her head no)

BYRON(continued)

I don't understand.

JANINE

You've made a mistake. A colossal one.

(FREEDOM gestures to the ground)

FREEDOM

May I?

JANINE

Take as much as you need, dear. Have a field day.

FREEDOM

Thank you.

JANINE

And you? I suggest you take this poor woman to the hospital. She looks ready to pop. Besides the cops will be here any minute.

BYRON

What the hell's wrong with you both?

FREEDOM

This nice lady is very forgiving, Byron. I for one thank you.

JANINE

Not at all, dear. Good luck to you.

FREEDOM

And you as well. The soil here is very fertile. I expect you'll have a good crop this year.

(From the distance, we now hear sirens)

JANINE

You're ride is here.  
(exits)

BYRON

Is she really not your mother?

FREEDOM

Just one more bite.

BYRON

I don't think I have the strength to handle this anymore. You're sick, Freedom.

FREEDOM

And here is where she must have been buried. Mommy's done with this world, so it's back to the ground. New life will grow.

BYRON

I... I can't help you. You're lost to me now.

FREEDOM

Graveyard dirt can soothe the mind and protect the child.

BYRON

Freedom, listen to me. Please. I can't stay. Do you understand what I'm saying to you? I'm not going to try anymore. I've done all I could. The police will come. They'll take you away and give you the care you need. OK?

FREEDOM

So go! Stop talking about it and do it already.

BYRON

I'd like to be with you, but-

FREEDOM

You've done enough damage.

BYRON

I only wish... What can I do? Tell me.

FREEDOM

I said go! Get out of here!

(FREEDOM flings dirt at him. BYRON backs off and runs away. The sirens gets louder as we now see the flash of blue and red lights. We hear the mumblings of the police radio. FREEDOM continues to dig)

FREEDOM (continued)

And here is where I was born. The pit pulled out of me, then crushed. My blood squeezed out, encased for years, aged to perfection. I'm a fine wine. Sip me. Gulp me down. Get fucking drunk.

(FREEDOM doubles over in pain as she clutches her stomach. She screams)

(BLACKOUT)