

the one who has seen

by Elod Pal Csirmaz
inspired by *The Wind* by Ray Bradbury

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Persons:

GEORGE
MARGARET
CHORUS

The action takes place on a stage furnished with two chairs only. There is a scarf hanging on the back of each chair. The presence of other props, objects and people (the telephone, the cards, the table, the coats, the guests, etc.) is indicated by the precise, pantomime-like gestures and movements of Margaret and George. The area to the Right of the chairs represents the kitchen; to the Left of them are the hall, the telephone and the entrance-door. The chorus stands outside the house, on the extreme Left. The members of the chorus wear scarves round their necks. The actors and actresses should be middle-aged, irrespective of the age of the characters personified.

In the script, ‘...’ indicates a sentence that dies away and was not intended to be finished, while ‘–’ ends sentences interrupted by another speaker. An utterance in a new paragraph is not necessarily linked directly to the previous words of the speaker. The actors should wait out the sentences implied between their utterances.

(The phone can be heard ringing. GEORGE goes and mimes answering it.)

GEORGE. Hello. Oh, it’s you, Alex.

Um...

The wind again?

CHORUS. The howling sons of Eos and Astraius
have descended from the distant skies again,
in new times to fulfil old destinies.
They led astray Odysseus, and cast
Santa María on the strangest shores.
Thousands of heroes they have shoved
into Poseidon’s foamy arms,
which guided them until they reached
the gaping mouth of Hades.
They’ve returned.
Have mercy, long-haired Boreas! ’
Spare us, son of Dawn and Starry Sky!

GEORGE. No, I can’t go over tonight. We’re having guests.

Margaret would kill me if –

Yes, that’s next week. She’ll be in Ohio for about nine days.

Of course I enjoyed it last time, but –

OK, OK.

Yeah.

Why don’t you take a sleeping tablet?

Yes, a sleeping tablet, and then go to bed instead of standing in the door and waiting for –

As you wish. Then get some writing done. How far did you –

Still at the same chapter? Try to finish it. It may –

I know it's not in your head, Alex.

OK. Take care. Give me a call if –

OK. Bye.

MARGARET. (*while preparing food in the kitchen*) Who was it?

GEORGE. Alex.

MARGARET. Not again.

CHORUS. It was him, Mrs Clark;
Driven by fear, he sought your husband's help,
just like he did so often in the past.

MARGARET. You slept there three times last week.

He's afraid of the wind again?

GEORGE. Yes.

MARGARET. You know, I think he shouldn't have climbed those mountains in the first place. Especially if he gets a persecution complex because of a little breeze.

GEORGE. I don't think it was an accident, that gale in Kansas, the tornado in the Himalayas... wherever –

MARGARET. That man simply attracts danger. That's all.

CHORUS. That gale in Kansas, the tornado in the Himalayas,
go wherever he could go, the wind has tracked him down.
He knows the reason only. '
Have mercy, long-haired Boreas –

(*The phone rings.*)

But hark! It might be him again.

MARGARET. Don't answer it. It must be Alex again. Why don't you lay the table. (*to herself*) Something I hope you can still lay.

(*GEORGE mimes carrying plates to the table and arranging them for the two guests and themselves.*)

CHORUS. He took no sleeping pill,
and didn't write the chapter:
standing in his door he watched
North Boreas to bend, '
one by one,
the trees along the road.

(*The ringing stops.*)

The wind has got there.
Spare him, son of Dawn and Starry Sky!

MARGARET. By the way, has he finished his travel book?

GEORGE. No, not yet.

MARGARET. He's still writing the chapter on the wind, isn't he?

GEORGE. Yes.

MARGARET. I wonder what he wrote about it... I think if I were the wind, I would be offended, too... you know, I wouldn't like to see all sort of personal stuff in print.

GEORGE. Don't make fun of him, Margaret, would you.

MARGARET. *(after a little pause)* I'd like to read his book sometime. I always found his whims amusing.

CHORUS. One is alone when fighting the invisible.
Forsaken by the blind,
deserted by the weak who chose the dark,
one's doomed to fail.
O take revenge by forging words out of your pain;
eternity will bring you peace.

(The phone rings. MARGARET sighs.)

GEORGE. Hello. Yes, it's me, Alex.

My God.

You slammed the door in its face? Nice one. Where are you now?

Sounds OK.

What?

Well, that's not the end of –

A match? Are you sure that's –

CHORUS. The wind loves playing games,
as everyone loves playing games
who are begetting foals in their spare time.
There's no escape. Should it not please him,
he wouldn't let you light a match.
The airy hand of Boreas
now turns the pages of the travel book, and reads.
He is the theme. It's dedicated to the ones who lost the game;
it's written by the one who saw and so deserves to die.
Prehistoric pursuer, villain, most successful predator
that ever hunted prey! Appease your wrath!

GEORGE. Are you sure you don't want me to come out there?

OK. But if –

CHORUS. The love and worry of a nonbeliever
cannot help him now.

- GEORGE. Are you safe inside?
- CHORUS. The house is strong, but, Mr Clark,
that gives a slight hope only. Boreas
is cleverer than that. '
On his forehead, centuries-old furrows,
on his head, the locks of bygone ages,
in his skull, the minds of sometime heroes,
in his arm, their armours' strength.
- GEORGE. Yeah, the cellar sounds OK.
- CHORUS. With just a fingertip he rips the pictures off the wall
and breaks a window into sparkling pieces –
- GEORGE. (*shouting*) Yes, I hear it! Are you sure –
OK, OK. My God!
- CHORUS. He can get through a hidden hole
and shoulder put to shoulder with Sir Isaac Newton
hurls down book and vase.
He stops now, possibly to gather strength.
- GEORGE. Are you still there? It's stopped.
Nothing serious? Thank God.
Oh, have you? I'm sure it's strong enough now, Alex.
- MARGARET. George!
- GEORGE. A minute.
- MARGARET. Bob and Paula are here!
- GEORGE. I have to hang up, Alex. Call me back if anything happens... with the
house, or...
OK. B-bye.
- CHORUS. He won't knock down the house on him,
as, Mr Clark, he wants the man.
Where do you think he's got his scheming mind?
The wind's a mental vampire sucking sense;
the minds of ancient people form its body
and are trapped in it until the end of times. '
One against them will become a member,
prisoner and prison of one's self.
It is the minds who make the ancient curse come true;
the wind is not more than the means.
- MARGARET. (*to the 'guests'*) I'm so glad you've come!
- GEORGE. Hi.
- MARGARET. C'mon in... Just give your coats and stuff to sour-puss here. Ha ha!
(*GEORGE mimes taking the coats and hanging them on the rack.*)
- CHORUS. Mr Clark!

MARGARET. Why don't you sit down? (*while sitting down herself*) I've made a few sandwiches to eat before –

Oh yes. Help yourself. I hope –

(*GEORGE joins them and sits down.*)

GEORGE. How are you, Bob? I haven't seen you for –

MARGARET. You don't say, Paula! That's some news!

GEORGE. Congratulations, Bob. I hope it's gonna be easier now that –
Yeah. Yeah.

MARGARET. And... did you do some celeb-
Oh... I'm sure you've had a nice time.

GEORGE. Yes, Bob? That one? No, that's been here for ages.
Yes, from a gallery. I think it's called –
No, it's not far from here. I'll give you the address if you want to.
OK. Just let me know.

MARGARET. (*possibly simultaneously with George*) Yours, too, Paula?
I don't know. The only thing that seems to help mine is washing them with lots of soap.
(*to Bob*) I'm glad you like them. Have some more. George's not the greatest fan of my sandwiches.

GEORGE. Actually, it's just –

MARGARET. That's OK, George.
Would you like start playing right away?
Yeah, Black Jack sounds OK to me, too.
George, would you bring the cards?

(*GEORGE does so.*)

CHORUS. Mr Clark!

MARGARET. We were playing the day before yesterday. I set up a new record.

GEORGE. (*returning, sitting down again*) So now it's time for the return game.
(*shuffles the cards*) Margaret! (*she cuts the pack*) Thanks.

MARGARET. No, no bets this time. This hand's for warm-up.

GEORGE. (*Discards the first card, then starts dealing the cards. He acts as the dealer.*) One, one, one, up, one, one, one and the hole card.
(*to Bob*) Taking a hit?

MARGARET. (*after a moment*) I think I'll stand.

CHORUS. Mr Clark! Do not you see?
The airy hands of Boreas do hold the cards.
There are no guests, the game is an illusion; '

the one remaining hole is being filled with water
 over the forlorn earth-dwelling hare.
 So much for faithfulness that's weakened by deceit,
 so much for their clear-sightedness
 that's blinded by transparent cloths.
 No might could stop you, Boreas,
 the son of Dawn and Starry Sky.

GEORGE. Ah, busted.

MARGARET. Twenty! Ha! *(she's the dealer now)* Place your bets now, ladies and gentlemen.

(The phone rings.)

MARGARET. Don't answer it, would you, George.

Oh, it's nothing... it's... his friend, that traveller I've told you about.

(laughs) Yes, yes... He's a bit...

CHORUS. He is the one who saw and so
 he is forsaken by the blind;
 he is the one who's doomed to death

(The ringing stops.)

according to the ancient curse.

(Silence.)

GEORGE. I'll hit. *(slowly)* You know, life's funny.

MARGARET. Eh?

GEORGE. I mean, it's lonely. I mean, we're just sitting here and playing, and we don't give a damn about how other people live or die. I mean, in this very moment, lots and lots of people are out there dying, and we don't even think about them. Some are dying of cancer, some in accidents, some –

MARGARET. George, I'm not sure this is a very stimulating conversation.

GEORGE. Why? Just imagine that an old acquaintance of yours might be dying in this very moment, or your best friend... only you don't...

(Silence.)

Sorry. It's...

MARGARET. *(after a pause)* Yes, yes. Thank you, Paula.

(The phone rings. MARGARET looks at George. The ringing stops abruptly.)

MARGARET. Nice evening.

(gives a card to Paula) Here you are.

Yes, it's quite hot. The air is so still here.

CHORUS. The air is so still here.

GEORGE. *(jumps up; runs to the telephone)* Operator? Give me 3-3-7-8, please.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

I'm sorry, sir. The lines are down in that district. When they are repaired, we will put your call through.

GEORGE. I see. *(pause)* Thank you.

I've got to get out there. *(runs back; grabs the scarf on his chair and puts it on)*

MARGARET. George!

CHORUS. Mr Clark!

GEORGE. I've got to get out there!

CHORUS. *(laughing)* George! *(they continue giggling)*

GEORGE. It's Alex! I'd know that laughter anywhere. He came on over, after all.

MARGARET. *(lets out a muffled scream, just like a whimper)*

GEORGE. Probably brought some friends with him. Sounds like a lot of people out there.

(opens the door) Alex?

None of your tricks now...

CHORUS. *(they laugh)*

GEORGE. *(uncertainly)* Alex?

CHORUS. He whipped the corner of your coat, and then passed on:
outwitting long-haired Boreas is hard.
He stalked him and destroyed him with a squeeze,
then sucked him out as does a spider:
that's the way to kill to gain intelligence.
It has come true, the ancient curse:
the people turn against each other,
and the dead want those alive.
The wind is no more in that door.
Why don't you close it, Mr Clark.
They stand upright already, '
the trees along the road.

MARGARET. *(indicating the place where the 'guests' were sitting)* Wh—where did they go? Where did they go?

(Blackout.)

(The lights go up. Margaret has put on the other scarf. They make a quick bow. The lights fade.)

notes

In the verse spoken by the chorus, I tried to achieve a continuous iambic flow. It was to this end that I employed truncated feet after feminine lines. (Lines starting with such feet are indented.) I also avoided constant line length to make the rhythm of the text controlled by the iambic pattern only, and not by larger units. At more emphatic line endings, where a strong semantic / grammatical boundary can be found, a syllable might be missing from the iambic flow. I think recitation should take a pause at such points, which pause will also substitute for the absent syllable. I have marked these points in the text with apostrophes. At normal line beginnings or after caesuras, occasional trochaic reversals can also be found.

What I found the most compelling in Ray Bradbury's story is its ending, which can be predicted from the beginning and which is presented as something absolutely inevitable. This feature makes the story similar to Greek tragedies. Another characteristic of the short story that I found challenging is that its hero is not present at the place of the narrative. In the play, I pushed this feature to the extreme inasmuch as here, even the words of Alex remain unknown to us.

Apart from these characteristics that I intended to retain, I also made some changes in the storyline and its background. I made the guests the cunning products of the wind with which he fools Margaret and George, as it showed how ruthless and determined Boreas was. Also, in the play, the ultimate reason for the wind's following Alex is a mystic curse that spoils all human relations and forces people to turn against each other, and not the supposed alien (or at least nonhuman) intelligence the wind primarily bears in Bradbury's story. There, it is the wind which uses the intelligence of the dead; here, the case is vice versa.