

WHAT HONOUR MEANS

by

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A WOMAN (EMILY) IS LYING IN A BED ASLEEP. THERE IS A BEDSIDE CABINET AND CHAIR. HER SISTER (ROSE) WALKS IN WITH A BOOK IN HER HAND. SHE PUTS THE BOOK ON THE BEDSIDE CABINET AND CHECKS ON EMILY. SHE PULLS THE SHEET UP TO MAKE HER SISTER MORE COMFORTABLE. THIS CAUSES EMILY TO WAKEN. EMILY FINDS BREATHING DIFFICULT AND HER SPEECH IS LABOURED.

EMILY: (CONFUSED) Royston?

ROSE: No Emily, it's Rose.

EMILY: (AGITATED WEAKLY FLAILING HER ARMS) Royston?

ROSE: No.. (GENTLY HOLDING HER DOWN) no.. it's me; your sister.

EMILY: (GAINING HER SENSES) Oh my dear Rose, I'm so sorry. I thought Royston had come home.

ROSE: I know you did; just take it easy. You need to save your strength.

EMILY: I thought he was here Rose, I could see him standing there.

ROSE: I know you did. I'm sure he would like to be here, and I'm sure he is in spirit.

EMILY: He wasn't there though was he?

ROSE: No I'm afraid he wasn't. You know he can't be.

EMILY TURNS AWAY; SHE KNOWS HER SISTER IS RIGHT BUT SHE DOESN'T WANT TO ADMIT IT.

EMILY: I wish I could see him one last time.

ROSE: Shall I read you the last letter he sent you?

EMILY: No, please. I know that by heart now. It's not the same. I want to see him.

ROSE: You can't; I'm sorry.

ROSE SLUMPS DOWN ON THE CHAIR. SHE AND EMILY HAVE HAD THIS CONVERSATION MANY TIMES AND IT IS ALWAYS WORSE ON ROSE. SHE MISSES HER NEPHEW, AND SHE IS THE ONE THAT HAS TO KEEP EXPLAINING THAT HE CANNOT COME HOME.

THE TWO SISTERS SIT IN SILENCE.

EMILY: (TURNING BACK TO HER SISTER) Rose?

ROSE: (MOVING CLOSER TO THE BEDSIDE) Yes, I'm here.

EMILY: I've not been that bad a person, have I?

ROSE: No, of course not dear.

EMILY: Why is God punishing me this way?

ROSE: He's not punishing you.

EMILY: Then why won't he let Royston be here?

ROSE: Well, perhaps if you close your eyes and ask him again he will tell you.

EMILY: He won't tell me; he has taken everyone from me.

ROSE: (BRUSHING HER SISTER'S BROW) Not everyone.

EMILY SMILES AS BEST SHE CAN AND WEAKLY LIFTS A HAND WHICH HER SISTER HOLDS WARMLY.

EMILY: Oh I'm sorry. You have always been a good sister to me. I don't know what I would have done without you.

ROSE: Run off with a sailor no doubt.

EMILY NODS WEAKLY, HER EYES CLOSE AND SHE FALLS ASLEEP.

ROSE SETTLES BACK DOWN ON THE CHAIR, PICKS UP HER BOOK AND BEGINS READING.

THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR AND SHE GETS UP, LEAVING HER SISTER SLEEPING.

THERE IS A PAUSE LONG ENOUGH FOR ROSE TO ANSWER THE FRONT DOOR AND FOR A FEW SHORT WORDS TO TAKE PLACE OFF STAGE.

ROYSTON WALKS IN WEARING AN ARMY OFFICER'S UNIFORM. HE GOES TO THE BED ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE TO THE CHAIR. HE KISSES HIS MOTHER'S HEAD CAUSING HER TO WAKEN.

EMILY: Royston?

ROY: Yes Mum; it's me.

ROY HOLDS HIS MOTHER'S HAND AND LETS IT REST BACK ON THE BED. HE STAYS HOLDING IT.

EMILY: I knew you'd be back.

ROY: I always hoped I would.

EMILY: You're here now; back home where you should be.

ROY: Yes, back to see you and get you back on your feet.

EMILY: You're a good son, but you could never get away with lying to me. We both know I'll spend the rest of my time in this bed.

ROY: You just need some rest.

EMILY: No, I just needed to see my son, and here you are, like a miracle.

ROY: You see sometimes miracles do happen if you wish hard enough.

EMILY: How did you get here?

ROY: Partly by train, and partly by Shank's Pony.

EMILY: You know what I mean.

ROY: Yes I do, but I'm not going to tell you.

EMILY: Why not. What are you hiding?

ROY: Nothing that is anything for you to worry about, but I'm afraid I won't be able to stay for very long.

EMILY: You won't have to; just until Rose gets back.

ROY: Oh I think I can stay a little longer than that.

EMILY SAYS NOTHING. SHE WEAKLY REACHES WITH HER OTHER HAND TOWARDS ROY'S HAND TO PAT IT, BUT IT IS TOO FAR AND SHE LETS IT REST WHERE SHE STOPS.

EMILY: I didn't think you would be able to get back to me.

ROY: Well it seems that a son's love for his mother can work wonders.

EMILY: I wonder anyone cares for mothers.

ROY: Oh don't say that. I know a lot of young men that would love to be sitting with their mothers right now.

EMILY: Not like this?

ROY: No, not like this.

EMILY FALLS ASLEEP AGAIN.

ROY GENTLY STROKES HER HAND AND LEANS HIS HEAD
DOWN ON THE BED.

AFTER A SHORT SNOOZE EMILY WAKES AGAIN
DISTRESSED.

EMILY: Was it a dream? Please God.

ROY LOOKS UP AND COMFORTS HIS MOTHER.

ROY: Mum, it's all right. You're home in bed. You're safe.

EMILY: Did I fall asleep again?

ROY: Yes, but only for a moment.

EMILY: I thought I was dreaming, and you weren't really here.

ROY: Well, you're awake now, and I'm still here.

EMILY: Yes.

ROY: Can I get you anything?

EMILY: No thank you.

ROY: Would you like me to fluff your pillow up?

EMILY: No.

ROY: Just let me know if you want me to do anything.

EMILY: Just stay with me.

ROY: Of course I will.

EMILY: I've missed you.

ROY: I've missed you too.

EMILY: How did you come back?

ROY: Never mind how; let's just talk about you.

EMILY: Nothing to say.

ROY: Then I'll just sit with you.

EMILY: Lovely.

ROY HOLDS HIS MOTHER'S HAND AND STANDS
SILENTLY NEXT TO HER.

ROSE COMES BACK INTO THE ROOM. SHE DOES NOT
MAKE EYE CONTACT WITH ROY, IN FACT TO HER HE

IS NOT EVEN THERE. SHE JUST SITS BACK IN HER CHAIR AND READS.

ROSE AND ROY SIT IN SILENCE. THEY DON'T INTERACT AT ALL. OCCASIONALLY ROY WILL BRUSH HIS MOTHER'S FOREHEAD BUT ALL THE TIME HE HOLDS HER HAND.

EMILY'S BREATHING GETS LABOURED AND SHE CALLS FOR ROSE.

ROSE PUTS THE BOOK DOWN AND TAKES HER SISTER'S OTHER HAND. ROY LOOKS ON CONCERNED BUT DOES NOT CHANGE HIS GENTLE HOLD ON HIS MOTHER'S HAND.

EMILY: He came back to me Rose.

ROSE: Yes, he came back.

EMILY: I can go now.

ROSE: No, no you don't have to go.

EMILY: Yes, it's all right now.

ROSE: No, Emily please.

EMILY: (TURNING SLIGHTLY TO HER SON) Goodbye Royston.

ROY: (GOES DOWN ON ONE KNEE AND PUTS HIS HEAD ON HIS MOTHER'S HAND) Goodbye Mum.

EMILY: (TURNING TO HER SISTER) Goodbye Rose.

ROSE: No Em don't go, please.

EMILY'S BREATHING STOPS AND HER HAND GOES LIMP.

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