

# **The Curl of the Night**

---

An extract from the play by Phil Tong

**AND OUTSIDE A GREAT WIND BEGAN TO BLOW...**

*IN THE DARK WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A WOMAN COUGHING.*

*LIGHT COMES UP TO FOCUS ON A BED. THE SHEETS ARE RUMPLED. THE BED IS TURNED BACK AS THOUGH SOMEONE HAS LEFT . THE LOOK OF THE SET AND COSTUMES SHOULD REFLECT THE FACT THAT THE DRAMA AND CHARACTERS ARE BASED ON THE PAINTINGS OF THE AMERICAN PAINTER ANDREA KOWCH.*

*ROBERT LIES IN THE BED. BATHSHEBA, A YOUNG WOMAN IN HER LATE TEENS/EARLY TWENTIES ENTERS WITH AN ENAMEL COFFEE POT AND A WHITE PORCELAIN CUP AND SAUCER. SHE IS WEARING HIS SHIRT AS A NIGHTDRESS.*

*THROUGHOUT THIS SCENE THERE SHOULD BE A SENSE THAT BATHSHEBA IS HIDING A COUGH, AND THAT HER BREATHING SHOULD BE A LITTLE LABOURED. THIS SHOULD NOT BE OVERTLY OBVIOUS, EITHER TO ROBERT OR THE AUDIENCE.*

**ROBERT**

Is that coffee?

**BATHSHEBA**

Yes. I thought you could do with a cup.

**ROBERT**

Thank you.

*ROBERT IS WISTFUL ABOUT FRESH COFFEE. HE BREATHES IN THE SMELL AS SHE POURS COFFEE INTO THE CUP. SHE BREATHES IN A LABOURED FASHION.*

**ROBERT**

Hmmn... Fresh coffee. It is fresh coffee. Isn't it?

**BATHSHEBA**

Yes.

**ROBERT**

I thought so. Nothing puts its arms around you and holds you so tight and close as the smell of freshly brewed coffee.

**BATHSHEBA**

What about.... Warm apple pie and freshly baked bread?

**ROBERT**

Please tell me you've not baked as well.

**BATHSHEBA**

No. I'm not your new housekeeper.

*ROBERT LOOKS AT THE YOUNG WOMAN  
STOOD IN FRONT OF HIM DRESSED ONLY IN  
HIS SHIRT.*

**ROBERT**

No. You're not. You're far from that.

*BATHSHEBA SMILES A 'WATERY' SMILE*

**BATHSHEBA**

I like to make fresh coffee every morning. It's one of life's pleasures.

**ROBERT**

Every morning? That's very regimented.

**BATHSHEBA**

First thing. Every day. Before it's light. Before I do anything else.

**ROBERT**

Wow.

**BATHSHEBA**

It's become something of a ritual with me. I like to start each day by taking freshly roasted beans and grinding them down in a pestle and mortar.

*SHE HANDS HIM THE CUP. HE NODS HIS  
THANKS. HE SAVOURS THE SMELL.*

**ROBERT**

And you went to all that trouble for me?

**BATHSHEBA**

No. As I said... It's something I like to do every morning. It's... a celebration, I suppose!

**ROBERT**

Of?

**BATHSHEBA**

Of me! Of... being alive!

**ROBERT**

You're certainly that.

**BATHSHEBA**

Yes. I am. Thank you.

**ROBERT**

I wish I could say the same.

**BATHSHEBA**

You don't feel like that?

**ROBERT**

No. Not always. Sometimes. But...not often enough.

**BATHSHEBA**

What about this morning?

**ROBERT**

I'll feel better after this.

**BATHSHEBA**

Yes. You will.

*BATHSHEBA STIFLES A COUGH. SHE CONSIDERS FOR A MOMENT AND THEN CONTINUES.*

**BATHSHEBA**

I like mornings. It's my favourite time of day.

**ROBERT**

I can see that. I hope you'll excuse me saying this but... there's a glow about you.

*BATHSHEBA SMILES*

**BATHSHEBA**

Standing in your kitchen this morning, it gave me great pleasure to throw open the back door and breathe in the bright cold air. I find it invigorating.

**ROBERT**

That's clear.

**BATHSHEBA**

But not you?

**ROBERT**

Mostly, I wake up and immediately want to go back to sleep.

**BATHSHEBA**

You don't feel enlivened by the prospect of each new day?

**ROBERT**

I'm enlivened by the coffee. So, thank you. Again.

**BATHSHEBA**

My pleasure.

*BATHSHEBA WATCHES HIM AS HE DRINKS FROM THE CUP. SHE SMILES.*

**BATHSHEBA**

I'll go and get myself a cup.

*BATHSHEBA EXITS DESPERATELY TRYING TO SUPPRESS A COUGH. ROBERT CONTINUES TO DRINK HIS COFFEE. HE REACHES OUT TO PUT THE CUP DOWN ON THE BEDSIDE CABINET AS BATHSHEBA ENTERS ONCE AGAIN WITH A CUP OF COFFEE BUT THIS TIME WITHOUT THE COFFEE POT.*

**BATHSHEBA**

You've finished. Can I get you another?

**ROBERT**

No. Thank you. One's fine.

*BATHSHEBA DRINKS FROM HER CUP. AS SHE DOES SO SHE SEEMS TO BE STUDYING HIM.*

**BATHSHEBA**

You're right. It is good coffee.

**ROBERT**

It's a special roast. Apparently. According to the guy in the store.

**BATHSHEBA**

I have to agree. It is special.

**ROBERT**

He roasts his own.

**BATHSHEBA**

It's a special skill.

**ROBERT**

It is. It's how he once earned his living. Apparently. Before he took on the store.

**BATHSHEBA**

Well.... He's good.

**ROBERT**

Yes. He is. I'm glad you're enjoying it.

**BATHSHEBA**

Tell me. I'm intrigued now. You bought these special beans, but you've never tried them?

**ROBERT**

I was waiting for you.

**BATHSHEBA**

Really?

**ROBERT**

Why not?

*HE SMILES*

**ROBERT**

You have to admit... It does feel like fate. Doesn't it?

**BATHSHEBA**

Maybe. A little.

**ROBERT**

Do you know the word that's just jumped into my head? Kismet! What do you think?

**BATHSHEBA**

You mean.... Do I know what it means?

**ROBERT**

No. As a way of describing this.

**BATHSHEBA**

And what is this?

**ROBERT**

This moment. You and me? Here.

**BATHSHEBA**

Us. Together. In your bedroom. Discussing coffee?

**ROBERT**

I was thinking more of you stood there, wearing my shirt.

**BATHSHEBA**

You don't mind, do you?

**ROBERT**

No. I don't mind. It looks better on you than it ever did on me!

**BATHSHEBA**

Thank you.

**ROBERT**

You're welcome.

**BATHSHEBA**

It was the first thing to hand.

**ROBERT**

When you decided to get up and make coffee?

**BATHSHEBA**

Yes.

**ROBERT**

So. What do you think? Would you describe this as Kismet?

**BATHSHEBA**

Maybe.

**ROBERT**

How else would you describe it? You here in my house this morning. Me buying that special roast and your liking for making coffee in the morning.

**BATHSHEBA**

You might be right.

**ROBERT**

Yes. I might. So....

*BATHSHEBA DOES NOT ANSWER BUT FINISHES HER COFFEE AND GOES TO PICK UP ROBERT'S CUP ON THE BEDSIDE TABLE.*

**ROBERT**

Leave it. Tell me more about your mornings.

**BATHSHEBA**

There's not a lot more to tell.

**ROBERT**

I'm sure there is.

*BATHSHEBA LOOKS AT HIM, TRYING TO WORK OUT WHAT HE'S THINKING.*

**BATHSHEBA**

Don't you want to go back to sleep?

**ROBERT**

Right now?

**BATHSHEBA**

Yes.

**ROBERT**

No.

**BATHSHEBA**

That will be the coffee.

**ROBERT**

It's not just the coffee.



*BATHSHEBA LOOKS AT HIM AS AN ANGLER MIGHT VIEW A FISH ON A LINE.*

**ROBERT**

Here!

*HE CLOSES THE COVER OF THE BED ON HER SIDE SO SHE CAN SIT.*

**ROBERT**

Sit! Tell me, why you love mornings so much?

**BATHSHEBA**

You're not really interested.

**ROBERT**

I am!

**BATHSHEBA**

Really?

**ROBERT**

Yes. My mornings can be so.... Ordinary. I want life to be extraordinary. So, what's your secret?

*BATHSHEBA SITS AND AS SHE DOES SO SHE STIFLES A COUGH.*

**BATHSHEBA**

There is no secret.

**ROBERT**

Then why don't I know about it?

**BATHSHEBA**

Because....

*BATHSHEBA IS UNSURE WHETHER TO SHARE INFORMATION WITH HIM.*

**ROBERT**

Please. I would really like to know.

**BATHSHEBA**

Given the circumstances; it feels presumptuous.

**ROBERT**

I don't know why you'd say that? Remember, it was me who asked you.

**BATHSHEBA**

We hardly know each other.

**ROBERT**

We do.

**BATHSHEBA**

I'm not sure we do. What do you know about me?

**ROBERT**

I know enough.

**BATHSHEBA**

Do you?

**ROBERT**

Are you wearing anything under that shirt?

**BATHSHEBA**

No.

**ROBERT**

So I'd say we know each other quite well. Wouldn't you?

**BATHSHEBA**

Had we met before last night?

**ROBERT**

No. I don't think so.

**BATHSHEBA**

No. So, before last night, it's true to say many might describe us as strangers.

**ROBERT**

Yes. I suppose they would.

**BATHSHEBA**

And when you meet a stranger for the first time, how do you behave?

**ROBERT**

Is it a man or a woman?

**BATHSHEBA**

Does it matter?

**ROBERT**

It does to me.

**BATHSHEBA**

Then.... Let's say, it's a woman.

**ROBERT**

So... With courtesy.

**BATHSHEBA**

And you'd treat a man differently?

**ROBERT**

In one respect only.

**BATHSHEBA**

And that is?

**ROBERT**

If it were a woman, I'd want to look deep into her eyes.

**BATHSHEBA**

Why?

**ROBERT**

To see if she was looking at me in the same way. To know if she was thinking the same as me.

**BATHSHEBA**

And what might that be?

**ROBERT**

Let me demonstrate.

*HE REACHES UP FROM THE BED AND OFFERS  
HER HIS HAND. SHE TAKES HIS HAND AND  
THEIR EYES LOCK.*

**ROBERT**

First, I'd offer her my hand. And then, when our eyes met, I'd want to see if she held my gaze...

*THE HANDS ARE HELD A LITTLE LONGER  
THAN MIGHT SEEM COMFORTABLE.*

**ROBERT**

And, if, I see a favourable answer to my unspoken question, I lean in and kiss the lady's hand.

*ROBERT KISSES BATHSHEBA'S HAND*

**BATHSHEBA**

Charm itself.

**ROBERT**

I aim to please.

**BATHSHEBA**

Do you?