

SELDOM IS HEARD

by

Mary Steelsmith

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Mary Steelsmith
5122 W. 9th Street
Los Angeles, CA 90036
Phone: 323-934-5652
Email: Marysteelsmith@aol.com

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

IVAN- 20's - 30's

A strapping, young man, dressed in a faded buttoned up work shirt and jeans, wearing a kerchief that covers his hair. He totters unsteadily. We hope he won't tip over. Whatever happened to make him this way, there are no outward scars.

HANNAH - 20's -30's

Hannah is a plain looking woman, perhaps large-sized. She wears a buttoned up shirt, covering a tank top beneath it, and jeans. Hannah carries herself with a familiar caregiver's energy, tired but in a groove of well-practiced cheerfulness.

MARILYN - 30's - 40's

With one glance, you can tell she's one of those women who made sure her home was spotless before she left it this morning. Marilyn's hair is perfect and she sports a pink feminine suit with matching purse, fit for the many cosmetics it must contain. You just know her car is pink.

SETTING:

Two chairs signifying a front porch of a modest house in the suburbs.

SYNOPSIS: Hannah has quite a bit on her plate nowadays. Her husband, Ivan, has returned from his tour of duty in Afghanistan with an I.E.D.- caused brain injury. The term "supporting our troops" seems to have a different meaning now that he's home. Ivan's noisy and unpredictable behavior on his own front porch irks Marilyn, president of the local Neighborhood Restoration Association (NRA), who insists Ivan be put in a "special place," in order to keep up the local morale. Recognizing the war on terror has to also be fought on the home front, Hannah and Ivan choose to reenter mainstream society and credit Marilyn for her bright idea.

SELDOM IS HEARD

SETTING: Two chairs signifying a front porch of a modest house in the suburbs. In one of the chairs sits IVAN, He looks out over the audience, staring at us, blankly.

HANNAH

(off - sings)

Oh, give me a home... Where the buffalo roam...

IVAN

..ome ...oam..

HANNAH

(off)

Ivan. Are you singing?

IVAN

(sings)

Fallo.. Oam..

HANNAH

(off)

And the deer..

IVAN

Ear.

Hannah enters with a child's sippy cup.

HANNAH

And the..

IVAN

The?

HANNAH

Something. Something play. Starts with Ant.

IVAN

Can't.

HANNAH

Tel...

IVAN

Cantaloupe.

HANNAH

Cantaloupe play? Do cantaloupe really play? At home? Do cantaloupe play or just lay around like you do all day?

Ivan's hand flies up to his shirt. He starts to unbutton it.

IVAN

Lay. Me.

Hannah takes Ivan's hand away from his shirt and puts the sippy cup in it. She tries his other arm, but it won't move.

HANNAH

Drink your sippy. Apple juice.

IVAN

Ba-juice?

HANNAH

Apple.

IVAN

Pull.

HANNAH

Just drink it, Ivan.

She helps him find his mouth with the cup. He drinks noisily from the sippy cup, allowing juice to pour down his shirt. Hannah sighs and takes a little towel out of her pocket and cleans him up.

HANNAH (cont'd)

I know. *(Sings)* For seldom is heard, a discouraging word..

MARILYN

(from the back of the audience)

Yoo-hoo!

Ivan suddenly points the sippy cup out toward the audience, as MARILYN enters.

IVAN

Incoming! Down! Down!

Suddenly lucid and frantic, he flails his good arm around and tries to hide behind a chair. Hannah has her hands full, trying to calm him down as Marilyn approaches them.

MARILYN

Oh, I hope this isn't a bad time, Hannah. Want me to come back when it's better?

HANNAH

There's never a better time when it comes to you, Marilyn.

MARILYN

We haven't seen you around, much. You don't come into the store like you used to.

HANNAH

It's pretty much a pay and run situation nowadays. Can't stand to leave my guy alone for long.

MARILYN

Or church. We've all missed your lovely voice in the choir. Though I can see you've been practicing out here.

HANNAH

What do you want, Marilyn?

MARILYN

Always cutting to the quick, aren't you. I'm just doing my Christian duty. Checking up on you.

*Ivan starts to unbutton his shirt.
Hannah catches his hand. He starts to
unbutton hers. She stops him.*

HANNAH

Great. Now you can check us off your list.

MARILYN

And how is.. *(whispers)* the patient?

HANNAH

His name is Ivan.

IVAN

Huh?

HANNAH

Remember his name? Ivan.

IVAN

Huh?

HANNAH

He's sitting right in front of you. He can hear every word you utter. Say hello, Ivan.

IVAN

Hello.

MARILYN

Hello.

Hell.

IVAN

O. Say hello.

MARILYN

O. O. Hell.

IVAN

Poor thing can't get out what he wants to say.

Ivan laughs as Marilyn takes Hannah aside.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Oh, Hannah! I knew he was bad off, but sweetie...

HANNAH

But what?

MARILYN

Well, look at it.

HANNAH

I do. Every day. I look at him.

MARILYN

It's just... tragic to see it... And you. Well, look what it's done to you. I mean, face it. You've just let yourself go, honey.

HANNAH

Go? Funny, I don't feel like I've gone anywhere, lately. Not since I brought this big lug home.

MARILYN

Yes, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. But first...

Marilyn digs around in her purse again and brings out a little American flag. She approaches Ivan with it.

MARILYN (cont'd)

We of the Neighborhood Restoration Association are very grateful about you serving our country.

Ivan pulls away from her, afraid. Marilyn hands the flag to Hannah.

HANNAH

Thanks. We know exactly where to put it.

MARILYN

That being said, Hannah, we need to speak frankly...

HANNAH

Look, we did everything you asked. We moved his ramp to the back of the house. You can't see it from the street anymore. All that in order not to .. How did you put it? Oh yes, upset the sensitivity of the neighborhood esthetics... that was the word, wasn't it? Esthetics? Big word. I remember you using it several times, especially right after he returned from Bethesda and couldn't sit up on his own yet. I keep his wheelchair inside the front door, hidden, except when he has to be moved. You'll forgive me for that.

MARILYN

Oh, yes! Of course. And you've been doing a lovely job. Really. Lovely. However, we're just a wee bit concerned.

HANNAH

We? Who is this "we?"

MARILYN

Well, you know. We, here in the Neighborhood Restoration Association.

IVAN

N.R.A.

MARILYN

We're concerned. About your (*whispers*) husband.

HANNAH

Why are we (*whispers*) whispering?

MARILYN

Well, I don't want to hurt his feelings. That is... if he still has them.. What with his.. Uh.. head.. And its.. well, its unfortunate...

HANNAH

Shrapnel.

MARILYN

You don't mince things, do you?

HANNAH

No. We've had enough mincing in this family for a lifetime, thank you.

MARILYN

Look! I'm here as a friend. Oh, let's get this over with. It's about your husband.

HANNAH

His name is Ivan.

IVAN

Huh?

Hannah moves to Ivan, protectively. He starts to unbutton his shirt. This time, she doesn't stop him.

MARILYN

There have been some concerns raised about the.. well.. noise level, coming from...it.. him. There is all this wailing. Day and night sometimes. It's disturbing the peace of the neighborhood. Why, children are out there singing "Home on the Range" with the wrong lyrics. And we, the Neighborhood Restoration Association, that is, We were wondering when he..your husband.. all right, Ivan..

IVAN

Huh?

MARILYN

We were just wondering when he would be going in for the.. shall we say, "restoration of his personal neighborhood."

HANNAH

The what?

MARILYN

Into the Veteran's home.

Ivan laughs, nice and loud. It hurts Marilyn's ears. Hannah gives Marilyn a hard look.

HANNAH

This is our veteran's home. This is where he lives.

MARILYN

This is where he sings and shouts. Everybody around here can hear him day and night, hollering, hooting and singing, at the top of his lungs. He's starting to scare the old folks.

Ivan has finished the buttons of his shirt and is starting on Hannah's.

HANNAH

It's true. He is loud. Just a little hard of hearing, thanks to the I.E.D. I'm sure you know what an I.E.D. is.

MARILYN

You don't think I know what happened in Iraq? I'm informed. I watch Fox News.

HANNAH

Afghanistan.

MARILYN

What?

HANNAH

Afghanistan. You know, the other white meat.

MARILYN

Oh. I thought he was fighting in the war against terrorism.

HANNAH

He still is. We both are.

MARILYN

Then you understand my position. You never know when the terrorists are going to strike.

HANNAH

Or where. Or what they'll look like. For all we know, they could wear pink.

MARILYN

What's important here, is morale. People look at this and it's disturbing their peace. Here I am, trying to keep up everybody's spirits and there he is. I mean there are these special places for people like .. Um..well. him,.

HANNAH

Oh yeah, they're special, all right.

MARILYN

You know, our troops are getting the very best medical care in the world.

HANNAH

Have you ever been to one of those "special places?" Oh, what a treat. Really, Marilyn, you owe it to yourself to visit. Special sights. Special sounds. Special smells. Especially when there's a staph infection going around. Remember that one, Ivan? Unforgettable. And crowded? At least you won't be lonely there.

MARILYN

Hm. You used to be so quiet. So sweet. Whatever happened to the HANNAH I used to know?

HANNAH

I dunno. Went to war, I guess.

MARILYN

More like you became one of those raving liberals. I suppose next you'll be camping out, making a spectacle of yourself.

IVAN

Aving.

MARILYN

If you can't or are unwilling to get him into a...special place...for people like that, then you'll have to keep him inside.

HANNAH

Inside the house? Like a prison, inside?

IVAN

No.

MARILYN

I wouldn't call it that. Just safe. Inside the house. Why are you making this harder than it needs to be? It's frightening and people aren't used to seeing this kind of thing. What is he doing?

Ivan has made quite a bit of progress unbuttoning Hannah's shirt. She takes it off and gives it to him, wearing only her tank top.

HANNAH

It's a little homemade dexterity therapy. (To Ivan) Sweetheart, button me up again.

MARILYN

See what I mean? Exposing himself right here in public.

HANNAH

Exposing me, more like.

Hannah laughs as Ivan starts to connect his buttons with her shirt's button holes, connecting them together.

MARILYN

Don't you see what you're doing? You go downhill and the neighborhood goes down with you. Property values plummet. You have to handle this. If you don't, we will.

HANNAH

Will we, now? Handle it? "It," being my husband?

MARILYN

I'm talking about "it," as in the problem.

Hannah looks at Ivan, who gazes back, at a loss for words. She is near tears.

HANNAH

The problem. There's always a solution to every problem. The problem is people are afraid. They're afraid of what they don't know. They don't know Ivan. They don't know him as he is now.

MARILYN

That's right. Now you see.

HANNAH

Yes. Now I see. And the solution is standing right in front of me. (A beat) Thank you.

Hannah unexpectedly hugs Marilyn, who pushes away, startled. Hannah heads off stage.

MARILYN

HANNAH! What are you doing? What is this?

HANNAH

(off)

This is me getting Ivan's wheelchair. (To Ivan) Honey, button up, we're going out! We're going to the store. We're rolling down the street. We're going to church, and sweetheart, we're gonna sing!

IVAN

Whooo Hoooo!

MARILYN

But you can't.

HANNAH

(off)

You're right, Marilyn. We can't hide IVAN from the neighbors. That would be like letting the terrorists win. Don't worry. You'll get all the credit. We'll tell everybody it was YOUR idea.

IVAN

You idee. May lin idee.

He finds the sippy cup and flips it at Marilyn, nearly catching her lovely suit in apple juice.

MARILYN

No. Oh no. Nooo.

She exits in a hurry. A beat. Hannah reenters, crying.

HANNAH

Thank God she's gone. Oh, honey. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. She got me so mad. I shouldn't have used you like that.

IVAN

No. Okay.

I'm sorry.

HANNAH

NO so ree!

IVAN

Ivan stops Hannah with his good hand, forcing her shirt into her arms. He indicates for her to put it on. Still connected by the buttons to his shirt, she does so. Ivan pats his leg with his good hand, getting her to sit on his lap. He holds her while she weeps.

IVAN (cont'd)

Go fa ride lata?

HANNAH

Go for a ride later? You wanna? You betcha.

IVAN

(sings)

Wha selda is.. Wha selda is... *(shouts)* HANNAH!

HANNAH

(sings)

Where seldom is heard..a discouraging word.

He kisses her encouraging lips.

BLACKOUT