

THE LASTING WAKE

Written by

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CHARACTERS-

Deborah, a woman in her forties

Wayland, her husband, slightly older

Jonas, a young man in his twenties

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A table sits in a kitchen, places set for two. Broken dishes are on the counter, next to a frying pan with scrambled eggs. Otherwise the kitchen is clean. A calendar on the refrigerator has the days 1-17 each marked with a red "X", "take flowers" is written in the square marked 18.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Car sits in a driveway, lightly forested area can be seen. House door can be heard shutting twice- out of frame.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - EVENING

Car is moving down a sparsely trafficked road. A couple sits in the front, a young man in the back. The woman is looking at a map and a picture of a young woman. The older man is concentrating on driving. The young man stares down at his hands.

DEBORAH, resigned housewife with a pleasant face, loyal heart and hopeful soul. Dressed in black, she stares at the map in front of her, tracing a route with her fingertip.

DEBORAH

It's vague now, dispersed by lack
of understanding.

Deborah shakes her head, looks out the passenger window as she continues.

DEBORAH (CONT'D)

Would you let me if I asked you?

WAYLAND, rough hands grip the steering wheel in front of a tightly set jaw. The black button-up that he wears has faded and become frayed from use.

WAYLAND

(focused on the road)
Die if you want or let it run its
course. I'll die too.

DEBORAH
(her head snaps toward the
man)
You'd let me?

WAYLAND
You know I can't.

Wayland squints into the sun and slams the visor down loudly.

DEBORAH
I was outside yesterday after it
rained. I saw you painted the shed
again.

WAYLAND
It's still not right. I'll strip it
tomorrow while it's still cold out
and repaint it after dark, once we
get back from this...

DEBORAH
So that's your secret. You'll work
yourself to death.

Wayland opens his mouth as if to speak but instead glares at Deborah from across the car before focusing his gaze into the rearview mirror.

JONAS, deathly pale with disheveled hair, he sits in the back seat wearing a black button-up and black slacks, holding a white tulip.

WAYLAND
(glaring at Jonas in the
mirror)
Why don't you make yourself useful
instead of sitting there the whole
trip.

DEBORAH
Don't bother with him. There's no
peace from it.

WAYLAND
(coldly)
Is that in the handbook?

Wayland wrings the steering wheel with his clenched hands.

DEBORAH
I brought cold cuts, bread and your
favorite mustard with us.

WAYLAND
(flatly)
Is that right?

DEBORAH
I never see you eat anything. You
must be starving.

WAYLAND
If that's what you want.

JONAS
(as if spurred by
something unheard, he
begins a monologue,
boisterously)
When I was seventeen I was home
with Grandpa back in Galvestone and
we were crabbing one morning on the
pier there, just me and him and the
dogs.

WAYLAND
My favorite part. Is this in the
handbook?

DEBORAH
(dryly)
It can't be helped.

JONAS
A thunderstorm had been sitting off
on the horizon like it was watching
us, boiling lead and spitting mist
and snapping at the sea. We were
drenched as all hell and up to our
elbows, but every time we pulled a
pot up, there they were, climbing
over each other like clacking
spiders.

WAYLAND
It's not right to make us hear
this. It's got nothing to do with
us.

DEBORAH
(dropping the map into her
lap, she lets the picture
fall on top of it, the
picture slides to the
floor at her feet)
It won't do any good talking like
that. Let me fix you a sandwich.

WAYLAND

(oblivious)

I should just go into town after it gets dark. Walk around the hardware store and touch things.

DEBORAH

(busy making a sandwich)

The weather said it might warm up soon. I could go with you.

WAYLAND

I won't look at anyone. There'll be bags of soil in the cart and autumn plants, maybe a peony. I'll leave the cart at the register and walk out.

DEBORAH

(reaches her hand toward
Wayland, a sandwich in
it)

Why don't you have a few bites.

Wayland takes the sandwich out of her hand and rolls the driver side window down. He tosses the sandwich out of the moving car. Grabs a jar of mayonnaise and throws it out of the window, then the cold cuts. Leaves the window down, wind rushing into the car.

DEBORAH (CONT'D)

(reciting a memorized
line)

A little while and you won't see me. Again a little while, and you'll see me.

WAYLAND

You read that somewhere?

DEBORAH

(twisting the loaf of
bread in a bag)

You never talk about it. You're completely flattened now, like a tired symbol.

WAYLAND

What could I say?

DEBORAH

Say you loved her.

Jonas has begun kneading his face with his hands and muttering incoherently.

JONAS

(as if troubled)

When I was a living up North I went
out with Jim over this iced duck
pond back behind our house.

Wayland rolls the window up and slams his hands on the steering wheel.

WAYLAND

(sternly)

That's enough.

JONAS

Jim had a cat tucked up under his
arm, a mean and mangy son of a
bitch that lived in the shed and
used to kill rats. Next thing I
know Jim's stomped a hole in the
pond and there's the cat, shoved
right up under that ice.

DEBORAH

We've heard this story again and
we'll hear it again every night
that we're awake.

WAYLAND

(furiously)

I'll kill him and kill myself. You
know I will.

JONAS

(voice raised)

I told him that was going too far,
but he wouldn't listen. I wasn't
any match for him, not when he set
his mind to something.

WAYLAND

What made us endure?

DEBORAH

(setting the bread on the
floor in front of her,
sees the picture there)

Faith.

Deborah lifts the map back up and peers out the window.

DEBORAH (CONT'D)

You remember that city park with the elm tree that had the mark on it?

WAYLAND

It was an oak. The one with the mistletoe tied up in the branches.

DEBORAH

You told her that patch of rot was a doorway to the faeries, remember? She loved that story.

Wayland pushes the visor back to the roof, squinting in the sunlight again.

WAYLAND

I remember.

DEBORAH

You're hardly real now, you know. Nothing more than a dull ornament on this charred but lingering tree. A flat character.

WAYLAND

Should I say something?

DEBORAH

You could say you're a man who fixes things, but that'd be flat, too, wouldn't it? I wish you had eaten.

JONAS

(voice stern and serious,
moving in his seat)

When I took her purse she was still alive. There was only 15 bucks in it and a metro card.

DEBORAH

That's a lie. We heard you say it before, but it's a lie.

JONAS

Fifteen goddamned dollars. I took the cash and her earrings but I didn't touch her.

DEBORAH

(looking at the map)
Say something, Wayland.

WAYLAND

(a look of concentration
on his face, he turns an
ear to the dashboard)
I think the car sounds funny,
timing might be off. I'll have to
get under it when we get back into
town.

JONAS

It's not like in the movies where
you shoot someone and they scream
and grab their chest. A 35 slug's
in and out like a holepunch, faster
than you can feel it.

Wayland turns to look directly at Jonas, finger pointing at
the young man.

WAYLAND

(yelling)
You shut the fuck up!

JONAS

All that's left is the recognition,
a dumb look like a pig with its
throat cut.

Wayland moves as if he is going to climb into the backseat.
Deborah screams and grabs the steering wheel and pulls
Wayland down back into his seat.

DEBORAH

(strained)
You only make it harder acting that
way. You're selfish.

Wayland gives his wife a concerned look, glances at the young
man in the rearview mirror and presses harder on the gas
pedal. Deborah picks her map back up, resumes looking at it.

JONAS

The look of that cat floating on
its back, it's a thing I can't
reconcile.

WAYLAND

Even now after all this, can't you
leave us alone?

JONAS

(suddenly weeping like a
child)
(MORE)

JONAS (CONT'D)

Scratching and biting up at the ice, I can't get over it. Sometimes when I'm sleeping I see it like it was, other times it's my bootheel over the hole.

WAYLAND

We've had enough now. When did this become our story?

DEBORAH

(touching Wayland's shoulder)

It's only how things are.

Wayland can be seen breathing deeply, nostrils flaring. Deborah stares straight ahead to the road in front of them.

JONAS

(solemn)

After the gun went off she laid there choking for a long time. I can still see her gurgling air through the hole in her throat.

Wayland moves as if he is going to lunge at Jonas again until Deborah grabs his shoulder, restraining him. Deborah's eyes are full of anger and fear.

JONAS (CONT'D)

It made me feel sick, so I shot her two more times in the face. That's just how it was, a terrible thing. When I left, her face was split like a pomegranate.

Wayland snarls and jerks the car to the side of the road as he slams on the brakes. Jonas slides across the back seat and Deborah's head hits the window. She screams.

WAYLAND

(turns to look at Deborah, hands still gripping the steering wheel)

They write about this in the handbook?

DEBORAH

(sobbing)

I don't know. I stopped reading.

Wayland checks for traffic, eases the car back onto the road. Deborah rubs her head and picks her map back up. Jonas stares at Wayland as he moves back to the center of the back seat.

DEBORAH (CONT'D)
(looking at the map)
There should be a turn up ahead, a
few miles to go.

WAYLAND
(looking away from
Deborah, at the passing
trees, then his lap)
I know where we are going. We do
this every year. The road never
changes.

Deborah looks out her window. The grey has gone to lead as
night's pulling in. The three figures are stark and isolated
under the glow of the overhead lamp of the car. Spurred by
some confirmation, Deborah folds her map up and throws it
onto the back seat.

WAYLAND (CONT'D)
(looks to Deborah before
tired eyes return
forward)
It's not the ache so much that
devours you as the waiting. A man's
weakness made plain as he counts
seconds.

Jonas reaches forward and places his hand on Wayland's
shoulder.

JONAS
You should've seen Grandpa's face
when we pulled it in. It must've
been fifteen pounds and black as
hell, with purple claws tearing the
other critters in the basket apart.
Grandpa said to throw him back
because he wasn't so good for
eating, but the way he was fighting
I just couldn't. How can you throw
something that awful out like it
was only ordinary?

FADE TO BLACK.