

Skeets

By Alexander King

Precis: Seven years after the Incident, three townspeople are brought in for interrogation by the City. The secret they give up is more terrible than their captors could ever imagine...

CHARACTERS:

ALGERNON: Steely, indignant, self-important.

BEATRICE: Hardened, disconnected, empty.

CONROY: Unhinged, twitchy.

ALGERNON, BEATRICE and CONROY sit in a line on backwards chairs, their legs entwined with the legs of the chairs. They cannot move.

ALGERNON: I never met him. He was gone before I arrived. But I heard the stories. I knew what he did. What he'd done.

CONROY: He had a shotgun. A Winchester, from back in the old days. Pressed his own shells with a machine he kept in his shack. Don't know what he used for shot.

BEATRICE: He used to sit outside his shack. All day. All night. Nobody ever saw him sleep. Just used to sit, that shotgun on his lap, watching the skies.

ALGERNON: I bet Conroy told you I'm a liar. The little pipsqueak. The shit.

CONROY: Who else did you get? Algernon? I bet you got him. Don't listen to a word he says, he's a fucking liar. You're wasting your time with him.

BEATRICE: He could hear them, you see. He could hear them in the skies - whenever you sent them. He heard them long before we did. Then he'd just stand up, walk into the road, and...

ALGERNON: Click, click, bang. That's all you'd hear. At first it woke the town up, but once we knew what he was doing, we'd just sleep through it.

CONROY: Click! Click! BANG! Ha ha! Fuck you! He'd just keep shooting them down!

BEATRICE: I bet they were expensive, eh? Cost a pretty penny did they? Your drones?

ALGERNON: Serves you right. We got away from the cities. We left, like you told us to, all those years ago. We left the cities after the Incident and we never went back. We set up our little town, just like all the other little towns, tried to start again...

BEATRICE: It's hard... living out there, none of this (*gestures to electric light*). Stragglers. Strangers. Making the best of it. The best we can. We can grow some simple crops, some of the soil is still usable. A chicken or two, we had a goat... but it got sick. It died.

ALGERNON: A simple life. Sometimes I think the Incident was the best thing that ever happened to us. Everyone was miserable in the cities. Some knew it, some didn't - but everyone was sick of life. We had too much of everything. Now we have too much of nothing. It's... better. You make more of what you have. People have new priorities.

CONROY: You really think we'd come back to the cities? Fuck off. You told us they weren't right, weren't safe. Now you want us to come back? Come back to the workhouses, more like! I'm not dying in a workhouse! I'd rather die out there!

ALGERNON: Oh, yes - we got your leaflets, the ones you dropped out on the wasteland every now and then. We used them for fuel. "Come back to the cities", "Work and a new life awaits!". How stupid do you think we are? There's only one type of work - the work that

keeps you from starving to death, or freezing where you lay. Anything else is a step backward, back to where we came from, and we all know how that turned out.

(pause)

ALGERNON: Those of us who survived, none of us were the same. After the Incident. And it seemed to change... our insides, somehow.

BEATRICE: We tried to start families. New ones. But, the babies... the babies didn't come out right. I had to wrap them in blankets. I had to bury them. Outside the town.

CONROY: I feel great! I've always felt great. Algernon's a whiner. Always moaning.

BEATRICE: Silently. In the wasteland outside town. In the white moonlight. I never knew the moon cast shadows before we came out here. When it's full. It always seems to be a full moon now. I don't know why.

ALGERNON: So you want him, eh? You want the man. Click, click, bang. Costing you a fortune I bet? No, like I told you - I didn't know him. I heard he spoke to the travelling traders when they came through. They were quiet, too. Quiet apart from the clanking pots on the sides of their mules. Too slow to track. He'd buy supplies, trade shells for water. Conroy used to hang around his shack like a bad smell.

BEATRICE: He... he was called Love. I don't know if that was his first name, or his last name, or just... if he was just named after what he was. Because, I think... I think that's why he did it. Without words. Just sat outside his shack with his old shotgun. His eyes always open.

CONROY: Watching over us.

ALGERNON: His eyes always open. The man.

BEATRICE: Isn't that what they used to say it was? Love? When you do something for another person not because you have to, but because you want to? Without a reason? Asking nothing in return?

CONROY: He never slept. Never.

(pause)

(All three crick their necks, simultaneously)

CONROY: *(Angry)* Algernon said what? The fucking grass. I told you he was a liar!

Alright, I tried to speak to him a few times, I admit that. No use. He didn't speak our language, at least I don't think he did. He'd just look at me with his cold watery eyes, then slowly turn his head back to the sky. I thought if I hung about he'd get to like me. But he didn't.

BEATRICE: We offered him payment. Food. He refused everything. He built his shack at the edge of town and kept himself to himself, but he was still one of us.

Will you let us go? Or has it gone too far now?

CONROY: You won't find him.

ALGERNON: Oh, I suppose Beatrice told you that? Well, Love wasn't his name. He didn't have a name. No kin. All I know is, he arrived one day, stayed for a while, then left. End of story. She makes things up. She's seen... horrible things. It's turned her brain.

CONROY: I bet Algernon told you he'd never met him? Strange how he knows so much about him, isn't it? Makes you think, doesn't it?

BEATRICE: I suppose, what he did - didn't really help, did it? I mean, you probably noticed that all your drones were disappearing in one place. Maybe he bought us a little time.

CONROY: The dust. The dust from the road, sitting like a ball of clay in your throat. We boil in the day, we freeze in the night. Still better than this metal shithole. Is this the best you could do? Seven years after you evacuated us all? You rebuilt... this?

BEATRICE: (*Gesturing around the room*) I don't like this. I don't think it's an improvement. I don't think you're back where you want to be. I don't... I don't believe you've learned anything.

ALGERNON: (*Gesturing and looking upwards*) "Now, God be praised, that to believing souls gives light in darkness, comfort in despair." I see you brought Him back, too.

So did we. We wanted salvation. You grasp for anything, out there.

BEATRICE: (*Looking upwards*) I expect you're looking for... forgiveness.

CONROY: (*Looking upwards*) They say He loves all of us. Even us animals. Stinking, piss-soaked animals.

(*pause*)

ALGERNON: At least we have each other. We are... a community. We've become close. We've had to. To survive.

BEATRICE: We rely upon each other.

CONROY: More like a family.

ALGERNON: Something you'll never have.

CONROY: And he's still out there, isn't he? Still roaming what's left of the world. Ha ha! Stinking like rotting meat, with his shotgun over his arm. Click! Click! Bang! Another eye in the sky -

ALGERNON: Gone. Tell me, do you get a glimpse of him? Do you get a chance to look him in the eye, from the safety of your... antiseptic city, before he pulls that trigger and turns your insects into shrapnel? He's still -

BEATRICE: One of us. Still part of the community. Because, when you're as close as we have to be, you share -

CONROY: Everything. Food, shelter, body heat... Secrets.

ALGERNON: Like I said, what we've been through, it's changed us. Made us -

BEATRICE: Closer. Made us very close. That's why -

CONROY: Even if we did know who -

ALGERNON: He was, we wouldn't -

BEATRICE: Tell you. But -

CONROY: He -

ALGERNON: Will -

BEATRICE: Make -

CONROY: You -

ALGERNON: Pay -

BEATRICE: For -

CONROY: Everything.

ALGERNON: You see, you don't know where he is. But we know where YOU are.

BEATRICE: Which means he does too.

CONROY: And the last thing you're going to hear, is:

ALGERNON: Click.

BEATRICE: Click.

CONROY: Bang.

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