

THE SINGER

A Monodrama In Nine Minutes

Bob King

There is no set. This is done with sound, lights, and a male actor in his forties. In the blackout, a piece of obscure, classical music is playing. Lights reveal the farmer. He listens to the music and eventually speaks.

Farmer

Did you ever get a song in your head that just won't go away?

He listens again. The piece finishes or fades away, replaced by the sounds of a late spring, country night.

I like it out here in the country. I like the quiet. The cycles of nature.

Smiles

Drove my daughter crazy. She couldn't wait to go off to college.

Slight pause

When I came back from 'Nam, things seemed pretty dull to me, too. Just . . . civilians, doing civilian things. And, I did a lot of drinking. Don't get me wrong; I wasn't one of those boys that the war messed up, those kids that never got used to the killing. Boys like me . . . used to the cycles of nature . . . had it a little easier. No, I was drinking because . . . because something wasn't complete, I guess.

A wry smile

Or maybe I was just bored. I had been to see the elephant, and it just wasn't the same watching crops grow.

Slight pause

Watching my daughter grow changed all that. I got my head screwed back on straight, got married, and I started a family . . . though not necessarily in that order *and*, I suppose, not necessarily all that successfully. My wife left me after about five years. She wanted . . .

Shrugs

Well, she wanted more than this.

Slight pause

And now my daughter is on the verge of stepping out into that bright, shiny world full of wonder.

Smiles

She wants to be a singer. A real singer. When she first went off to the University, it was all rock and roll. She hated this old stuff I play around the house all the time. But she got lucky and got a teacher that showed her there was more to music than flash and glitter, more than MTV. She got a teacher that . . . *cultivated*. My daughter was back home this past spring break, practicing for her graduation recital. I heard . . .

Slight pause

I heard her sing, and she's pretty good.

Chuckles

I guess she gets that from her mother. I couldn't carry a tune in a body bag.

He stops. Surprised, puzzled and pained. After a pause, he speaks quietly.

Where did that come from?

Slight pause

I knew boys that wanted to sing.

A pause

To most of us going to 'Nam, the world was as full of wonder as it is for my daughter. We were young and full of juice. But we were also scared.

Slight pause

I keep thinking about that song.

Slight pause

I was in Seattle, shipping out the next day or two. I wouldn't have paid any attention to her if she hadn't been crying. She was just sitting on a park bench, sort of staring off into space with tears rolling down her cheeks. Once I looked closer, I saw how pretty she was. So I went up to her, and, well, to make a long story short, I guess I picked her up. Only not like in a bar or something. She didn't want to have anything to do with me until she found out I was going to 'Nam.

Slight pause

For the longest time we just talked. Walked around the park and talked, like young people have a knack for doing. She was mysterious. Would never tell me her last name. Said she didn't want me to carry it to Vietnam. And she wouldn't tell me why she had been crying. Why, from time to time, big tears would just fill up those sad, brown eyes. We finally went somewhere and ate, but, mostly, we just walked and talked. And I fell in love.

Smiles

Well, I was only nineteen and couldn't hardly tell the difference between love and lust. I guess I was falling in both.

Slight pause

We wound up at her place, and, after a couple of hours, I thought . . .

Almost shyly aware of the audience

Well, we had most of our clothes off, and then . . . then she asked me not to go to 'Nam.

Slight pause

I said I had to. That boys from my part of the world had to.

Slight pause

She put on a robe and moved over to the window seat. Light was coming through the curtains, sort of framing her face and hair. She sat and looked at the night. The light was shining through tears. And she said, "I promised a boy that went over there."

Slight pause

I sat back on the edge of the bed and just stared into the dark at my feet, remembering all the stories I had heard about the war.

Slight pause

And then she began to sing. It was a foreign song, sort of low and sweet. It wasn't like for a funeral, but, still, it was maybe the most sad song I have ever heard.

Slight pause

I don't know how to put this into words, but I was thinking about things without thinking. Just pictures coming into my mind. Images of things I had known and believed would never end: Football nights in high school. Girls. Drinking secret beer on a dark country road. Swimming in a summer pond. Things I would never do again or see again through the same eyes. . . . And I began to cry.

Slight pause

She stood up from that window seat. The robe just sort of floated down into the shadows, and, for just a moment, she hesitated in that golden light. Then she came to me.

Slight pause

BOB KING

I was leaving; I had to leave. And I begged her for her name. But she never spoke again. She kissed me, and the door slowly closed. The click of the latch in that dark hallway was as sharp as the sound of a rifle bolt.

A pause

They flew me back into California, but I went up to Seattle and looked for her. The apartment, the places we went, the park. People vaguely remembered her, but she was just another college kid. No one knew her name or where she'd gone. I hung around town for about ten days, walking the campus grounds and the parks. But, finally, I gave up and came home.

Slight pause

I've forgotten what she looked like. Over time, she's become a mixture of all the women I've ever known. But I never forgot that song. I guess, over the years, I must have bought every classical record ever made. I like to think that's one of the reasons my daughter took a liking to that kind of music. But I never heard that song again.

Slight pause

Until I heard my daughter practising for her recital.

A pause

I'm going up to the University tomorrow to hear my daughter sing that song again. And to meet the teacher that taught it to her.

Fade to blackout

END OF PLAY