

LIKE A FISHBONE

An argument and an architectural model

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To call on them to give up their illusion about their condition
is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions.

Karl Marx

Their monument sticks like a fishbone in the city's throat.

Robert Lowell, 'For the Union Dead'

CHARACTERS

THE ARCHITECT, an older woman

THE MOTHER, a younger woman

THE INTERN, a young woman

THE CHILD, a girl

An oblique stroke (/) indicates that the following character should begin speaking simultaneously at this point.

Children singing in the distance. Their voices come and go on the shifting breeze. Winter rain against a large window. On a table an architectural scale model of a small town. At its centre, a little rise and a model schoolhouse; one entire wall of the model schoolhouse is see-through. A clear perspex box covers the entire model town. A woman, the MOTHER; long skirt, long blouse, long wet hair tied back with a scarf, looks 'out of time'. The ARCHITECT, dressed for the/an occasion, blinking as if a light has been switched on suddenly in a darkened room. Long pause.

MOTHER: Are you a lady? [*Pause.*] Hello?

ARCHITECT: I... I'm—

MOTHER: They told me to stay here.

ARCHITECT: They?

MOTHER: Downstairs. I—

ARCHITECT: Downstairs?

MOTHER: A man / told me to...

ARCHITECT: A man...?

MOTHER: Yes. At the front.

ARCHITECT: There's a man / at the front?

MOTHER: He told me... put me in here.

ARCHITECT: He put you...?

MOTHER: He told me to wait in here.

ARCHITECT: To wait?

MOTHER: Yes. He said / to wait.

ARCHITECT: To wait.

MOTHER: Smells in here.

ARCHITECT: Sorry?

MOTHER: Smells of glue.

ARCHITECT: Sorry. Smells?

MOTHER: In here. Smells of glue.

Pause.

ARCHITECT: [*suddenly realising*] Yes. That's for the... the models... for gluing things... one to another... for... I'm sorry, how is it I can / help?

MOTHER: I'm wet.

ARCHITECT: Yes.

MOTHER: It's raining.

ARCHITECT: Yes.

MOTHER: I came up by train. Only it wasn't a train. It was a bus. Rail replacement. Track works. Because of the flooding. It rained all the way.

ARCHITECT: Did it.

MOTHER: When I got here a lady at the station gave me her elbow to here. She had an umbrella but it didn't do any good.

ARCHITECT: Yes.

MOTHER: You're near the station, aren't you?

ARCHITECT: Are we?

MOTHER: It didn't seem far.

ARCHITECT: I suppose we're near the station.

MOTHER: Then the man downstairs put me in here. To wait. He said 'sit down' but I didn't want to. I'm wet.

ARCHITECT: Yes.

MOTHER: I didn't want to make things wet.

Pause.

ARCHITECT: [*suddenly realising*] I'm sorry... Yes, of course... Let's... We should have a... I've got a towel... some towel... There *should* be some anyway. [*Searching*] It's just that it's late and I thought I was the only one here.

MOTHER: I'm here.

ARCHITECT: I was expecting someone else.

MOTHER: The man told me to—

ARCHITECT: You startled me, that's all.

MOTHER: I'm sorry.

ARCHITECT: Here... it's not much... it's a... it's some towel. Here.

She holds out a roll of paper towel from somewhere. The MOTHER remains still. The ARCHITECT realises her mistake—the MOTHER is only partially sighted. She touches the MOTHER with the towel, causing her to jump a bit.

Sorry. Here. Sorry.

The MOTHER takes the towel and dries her face. The ARCHITECT looks at her watch. The MOTHER holds out the used towel for the ARCHITECT.

MOTHER: Thank you.

ARCHITECT: I'll take that then, shall I?

MOTHER: You smell nice.

ARCHITECT: I...?

MOTHER: Rain's heavy.

ARCHITECT: Yes.

MOTHER: You get used to the wet living down there...

ARCHITECT: / Down?

MOTHER: ... Still. Good for the cheese.

ARCHITECT: Sorry. Cheese?

MOTHER: Rain. Good for the grass. Good for the cows. Good for the cheese.

ARCHITECT: Yes, of course. The cheese. It's what you're known for down there, isn't it. Of course.

MOTHER: Yes.

ARCHITECT: Yes.

MOTHER: And the school.

ARCHITECT: Pardon me?

MOTHER: Now. We're known for the school. Aren't we?

ARCHITECT: Yes.

Pause.

MOTHER: Are we waiting, then?

ARCHITECT: Sorry. Are we...?

MOTHER: For the architect.

ARCHITECT: I'm sorry?

MOTHER: I'm here for the architect.

ARCHITECT: You are?

MOTHER: That's what I told the man downstairs. It's why he put me in here. He said it was late but that he should still be here.

ARCHITECT: He?

MOTHER: The architect.

ARCHITECT: You're waiting for / the architect?

MOTHER: The architect, yes.

ARCHITECT: I'm an architect.

MOTHER: I thought... I want to speak to the architect.

ARCHITECT: Yes. And I'm—

MOTHER: No. I'm sorry, but... *The* architect. I'm sorry.

ARCHITECT: The...?

MOTHER: *The* architect. The man said he should still be here.

ARCHITECT: I don't...

Pause. Suddenly the MOTHER tries to make her way to the door.

MOTHER: This must be a mistake. / I should. He said that he should still be here. That it's late but that he should still be here.

ARCHITECT: It's alright. Really... There seems to have been some... I'm the architect... you see?

Pause.

MOTHER: What?

ARCHITECT: I'm *the* architect.

Pause.

MOTHER: I thought. I thought. I'm sorry, but you're a lady.

ARCHITECT: Yes. You can be both.

MOTHER: Both?

ARCHITECT: A lady and an architect. A lady architect. A... Never mind.

MOTHER: I thought... he said 'he'.

ARCHITECT: Well, I'm a she.

MOTHER: I'm embarrassed.

ARCHITECT: It's alright.

MOTHER: I'm... I'm... I'm—

Suddenly the MOTHER lurches forward as if to faint.

ARCHITECT: Wait! Here... you're... here... there's a chair here...

MOTHER: I'm wet.

ARCHITECT: No you're not. You're dry now. It's alright.

MOTHER: I thought... I thought...

ARCHITECT: It's alright. It doesn't matter. Put your head between your knees.

MOTHER: I haven't stopped since I left.

ARCHITECT: You've come a long way. Put your head... That's it.

MOTHER: I've come a long way.

ARCHITECT: Yes.

MOTHER: And I thought you were—

ARCHITECT: It doesn't matter. Really. Take a deep breath. Good. And out. And another. And out. Good.