

***Shifting Refractions***

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Directed by Blake Bolan

Under the influence of Harold Pinter

**1.**

**Father:** How do you do?

**Ugly:** Fine. And you?

**Father:** Relatively pleasant.

**Ugly:** How... How is mother?

**Father:** I was with her and we were in love. Just she and I. Together. Young and in love. We didn't have problems, only each other. There were no little ones, no barriers, no obstacles, only us. You were not there. Only she was there. We were together and we were happy. You did not exist.

**Ugly:** I don't exist for anyone.

**Father:** It wasn't our fault. We just wanted to be together. There wasn't room for anyone else in our world.

**Ugly:** I've seen you—

**Father:** No.

**Ugly:** Yes.

**Father:** I don't think so.

**Ugly:** Don't you remember?

*Pause.*

You were there and you taught me how to swim. You taught me how to walk, to glide, to trumpet. Mom was there too, holding me sometimes and pruning my feathers. We lived by the side of a beautiful pond and when I strayed too far you brought me back home. Home. I was young and normal. You were there. You were my father. You loved me. Mother loved me. The ducks tried to be me. They bowed their heads. We were beautiful. We were together. We were family. The ducks wanted to be me but they couldn't.

**Father:** I didn't know you were there.

**Ugly:** I was.

**Father:** You were?

**Ugly:** I was.

**Father:** Your posture is terrible.

**Ugly:** Bad habit, I guess.

**Father:** Scotch?

*Pause.*

My wife was crying again. I didn't know how to get her to stop. I picked up our old tattered little blanket, that we found together on our first date. I put it over her shoulders, and she calmed down some. I encouraged her to go down to the stream. 'I will look after the egg for you,' I said to her.

**Ugly:** You looked after me.

*Pause.*

Your posture is immaculate.

**Father:** Bad habit, I guess.

**Ugly:** Lovely room. Very spacious. Lots of light.

**Father:** I like it when the room is open.

**Ugly:** You know, if there were some chairs in here—

**Father:** I don't like chairs.

*Pause.*

I was walking down a tunnel. I heard a duckling quack and quack and quack. As I walked along the tunnel, it seemed to get longer, and the quacks became quicker and louder. At the end of the tunnel I found a refrigerator. I opened it and found inside a bottle of milk.

*Pause.*

The milk was black.

*Pause.*

Coffee?

**Ugly:** Fine.

*(next 2 lines spoken simultaneously)*

**Father:** With cream and sugar?

**Ugly:** Black.

**Father:** Black.

**Ugly:** I'm surprised you have a fruit bowl.

**Father:** Why?

**Ugly:** Guess I never imagined my father with a fruit bowl.

**Father:** I like bananas.

**Ugly:** They're good.

**Father:** Definitely my favorite.

**Ugly:** Apples are good, too.

**Father:** Yes. Fruit's healthy. Keeps you regular.

**Ugly:** I was being looked at. Their eyes were all glued on me. They were all looking at me and praising me, like I was the most beautiful creature they had ever seen. Then a male swan came along, picked me up, and dropped me off in another pond. There, they looked at me with disgust.

**Father:** What do they call you?

**Ugly:** Ugly.

*Pause.*

They mocked me and beat me and told me I didn't exist.

**Father:** I didn't know you were there.

**Ugly:** I was.

**Father:** I was flying and I glanced down. You were there. Alone. I saw you and I knew it was you.

*Pause.*

How was life?

**Ugly:** As good as can be expected.

**Father:** I don't know you.

**Ugly:** You are my father. I want to be your son.

**Father:** I am a swan. You are a duckling.

**Ugly:** I did not mean to be a duckling. I never knew. I hatched and my duck mother was there. Everyone hated me and I was wrong. I'm sorry. I'm your son.

**Father:** I didn't expect this,.

*Pause.*

Sure I can't get you anything?

**Ugly:** No. It's too late.

*Pause.*

I see your face in front of me. Ugly like mine. I am making you mine because you will not make me yours. I am beautiful and you are not. How does that feel?

*Pause.*

How. . .How is mother?

**Father:** She passed away awhile back.

**Ugly:** Oh. Dreadfully terrible.

**Father:** Yes. Yes it is.

*Pause.*

She was a pleasant woman.

**Swan:** Well, hello.

**Duck:** You're uncharacteristically punctual.

**Swan:** I was always punctual.

**Duck:** You were always late. I thought.

**Swan:** I was there when I could be.

*Pause.*

How's life?

**Duck:** Just fine.

**Swan:** You've gained a little weight.

**Duck:** Oh.

**Swan:** No bother. How are your children?

**Duck:** Well. They are all growing up so—

**Swan:** Good to hear.

**Duck:** How. . .how is your mother?

**Swan:** You were infatuated with me.

*Pause.*

That made it a lot easier. If you didn't take it, I wouldn't be able to see you again. It was that simple.

**Duck:** Has he found you?

**Swan:** Who? Oh.

**Duck:** I do miss him. He was so young when he left.

*Pause.*

Coffee?

**Swan:** Black.

**Duck:** I was sitting, waiting for my husband. He had begun to visit less. I walked to the pond. And I went, my waddle straightened out. I was horrified. My feathers began to turn white. My neck grew into an elegant, sinewy thing. I was a swan. Beautiful, admired. But the other ducks hated me. They bit me and kicked me. Only I could see it. Only I could see I was beautiful.

**Swan:** I thought you'd be flattered. You seemed to want every other part of me. What's more a part of me than a son?

*Pause.*

I wanted to be on my own. Find my own food, make my own way. I couldn't handle the thought of it. The feel of it. Something walking out of an egg and effectively anchoring me to one spot. I hated it. He hated it. You always followed me. You always mimicked me. The idea of going through that again was too much. You envied me and I needed you. I did not mean to inconvenience you but I needed it gone. You were there, like always. You practically volunteered.

**Duck:** I like what you've done with your feathers.

**Swan:** Yes. I got them cut last Wednesday.

**Duck:** I never asked for your egg. You left me no choice.

**Swan:** What would you have chosen?

**Duck:** It's nice out today.

**Swan:** It's going to rain.

**Duck:** I had just prepared my nest. I ran to tell you and you were happy for me. You were expecting, too. We talked and laughed and swam around. We were going to raise our children together.

*Pause.*

Last time we spoke, you said you needed me.

*Pause.*

Thank you. Thank you very much.

**Swan:** I was with my husband in our nest. Warm, comfortable, secure. Young and self-involved. I walked to the pond. I looked in. I saw me, I saw him. I saw trees and shrubs and

the wholeness of the blue sky. I walked back to my nest. It was gone. I was free. Hugged by the stratosphere and my own down. It was gone, and I was free.

**Duck:** Lovely hat.

**Swan:** Thank you.

**Duck:** You were there. A whole pond to swim in and you chose to swim next to me. None of the other swans would ever swim with me. I must have been very special to you. I must have been very beautiful, that a gorgeous swan would ever talk with me. You let me ruffle your feathers as you went by. As you prepared to fly off I said, 'See you next Thursday.' You replied as you always did. 'Of course you will.'

**Swan:** You were there. I didn't want him. So, you were there.

**Duck:** You trusted me with your son.

**Swan:** You were just there.

**Duck:** You're selfish, you know.

**Swan:** Small price to pay, I guess.

*Pause.*

How is mother?

**Duck:** She passed away while back.

**Swan:** Oh. Dreadfully terrible.

**Duck:** Yes. Yes it is.

*Pause.*

She was a pleasant woman.