

Deluge  
or,  
The Panda Play

*a romance*

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or,  
The Panda Play

*a romance*

characters (3M/4F):

Chloe – mid-20s, a zoologist-in-training. Caretaker for Meng Meng and Da Liang.

Sawyer – mid-20s, a photographer. Does the cheesy souvenir pictures.

Nathan – mid-20s, a PhD student researching the history of madness. Works at the gift shop.

Chase – early 30s, a grifter. Shovels panda shit.

Meng Meng – a giant panda. Female. Several millennia old.

Da Liang – a giant panda. Male. Also several millennia old.

A serpent. Yeah. That Serpent. Female.

In the last scene, the woman is played by the actor playing Meng Meng or the Serpent.

setting:

A zoo, now. Specifically the panda habitat. Inside the habitat is verdant, with areas of shelter.

A zoo, one year in the future.

a note on formatting:

An em dash means a character cuts another off, or cuts herself off. An ellipsis indicates trailing off. Slashes designate overlapping. ***Bolded italics indicate an explosion – sometimes out of nowhere, sometimes the culmination of steadily mounting pressure.*** When a sentence ends with no punctuation, the character stops mid-thought

a note on the world:

Animals should be represented theatrically, not literally. No panda suits. Once the storm hits, the actors should actually be soaking wet for as long as possible, or is practical. Act and scene titles should be visually represented onstage in some way. Finally, rhythm is key.

\* \* \*

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

– Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day”

“The dream deceives; it leads to confusions; it is illusory. But it is not erroneous...And if, now, we try to assign a value, in and of itself, outside its relations with the dream and with error, to [madness], we must understand it not as reason diseased, or as reason lost or alienated, but quite simply as *reason dazzled*.” – Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

“I get the news I need from the weather report.” – Paul Simon, “The Only Living Boy in New York”

Part One: The Antediluvian Art of Shoveling Shit

1. Monday

*Outside the panda habitat.*

*Monday morning.*

*The zoo isn't open yet.*

*Chloe reads from a large textbook.*

*Chase enters.*

*They are both wearing terrible fake safari zoo uniforms.*

*You could cut the sexual tension between them*

*with a fucking steak knife.*

CHASE

Hey.

CHLOE

Hey.

*beat*

CHASE

Hey.

CHLOE

Do you need something?

CHASE

I thought we could talk about what happened this weekend.

CHLOE

Nothing happened this weekend.

CHASE

...  
Right.

CHLOE

So there's nothing to talk about.

CHASE

I just want you to know that that's never happened before.

CHLOE

Shouldn't you be working?

In a minute.

CHASE

You're supposed to be in there now.

CHLOE

The pandas don't know if their shit hasn't been shoveled.

CHASE

Meng Meng does. She likes a clean habitat.

CHLOE

She won't care if I'm a few minutes late.

CHASE

I do.

CHLOE

Rarely. It's rarely happened before.  
And if we were to do it/ again it would definitely not—

CHASE

I don't care. I just want you to do your job.

CHLOE

What are you doing?

CHASE

Studying.

CHLOE

For what?

CHASE

I have an exam in my ichthyology class.

CHLOE

Fish? I thought you were the Queen of the Pandas.

CHASE

Am I supposed to be impressed  
that you know the definition of ichthyology?

CHLOE

I don't expect her Majesty to be impressed by anything.

CHASE

CHLOE

We have to take electives. I thought I would try something new.  
It was a mistake.

*Sawyer enters.*

*She also wears the terrible safari uniform, but adjusted and accessorized in a way that is clearly intended to be sexy.*

*And she is a sexpot, almost compulsively coy.*

*In spite of herself, Sawyer has always depended upon the kindness of strangers.*

*She has a large camera around her neck.*

SAWYER

What was a mistake?

CHLOE

Nothing.

SAWYER

Not sleeping with Chase?

CHASE

Excuse me?

SAWYER

Oh yeah, don't worry about it dude.  
Happens to everyone.

CHASE

Unfuckingbelievable.

SAWYER

What?

CHASE

You told Sawyer?

CHLOE

*(as in "What do you want from me?")*

What?

CHASE

Did you tell anyone else?

SAWYER

I tweeted it.

You're fucking kidding me.

CHASE

Yes. She is. Don't worry./  
No one else knows.

CHLOE

I'm kidding, okay. Jeeze.

SAWYER

You need to tuck in your shirt. You're out of uniform.

CHLOE

*(to Sawyer)*

The zoo doesn't even open for another fifteen minutes.

SAWYER

You're on the clock. You should look professional.

CHLOE

*Nathan enters in uniform.*

*Of everyone, it looks the most unfortunate on him.*

Storm's brewing.

NATHAN

That's for damn sure.

SAWYER

*stormy silence*

What?  
Was it something I said?

NATHAN

We're just happy to see you.  
How's everything at the gift kiosk, little man?

CHASE

Certainly less scatological than the confines of the habitat.

NATHAN

Fuck me—

CHASE

That's kind of difficult, from what I hear.

SAWYER

I have to go work.

CHASE

Have fun.

SAWYER

See you later Chloe.

CHASE

*Chase exits.*

I asked you not to say anything.

CHLOE

Does he seem extra on edge to you?

SAWYER

No, he's always that unpleasant.

NATHAN

You're jealous.

CHLOE

Of Chase? Fat chance.

NATHAN

Not you.

CHLOE

Listen Chloe, I think it's great that you cut loose for once and got hammered. You almost even got laid.

SAWYER

I don't think this conversation is really appropriate for the workplace. Nathan, maybe you should head back to the Panda Palace.

CHLOE

Yeah, no, you're right.  
I just um  
ask Sawyer

NATHAN

Is everything okay?

SAWYER  
*(oblivious)*

NATHAN

Yeah. I just. We got these new things in  
in the Panda Palace and I thought I should try them  
so when guests ask if they're good I can tell them  
but I'm allergic to chocolate so I thought you could—

SAWYER

Nathan, what are you talking about?

NATHAN

Oh! I got you a Panda Pop.

*He produces a chocolate panda bear on a stick.*

SAWYER

You're a lifesaver. I didn't have time to eat breakfast.

*She bites the panda's head off.*

NATHAN

Great.

CHLOE

Did you pay for that?

NATHAN

Yes, Chloe. I did.

CHLOE

Cool. Just, you know, sometimes people forget employee policy—

NATHAN

I didn't.

CHLOE

And I appreciate that.

SAWYER

This is good. I wish it was dark chocolate though.  
Milk chocolate tastes like my childhood.

CHLOE

Gross.

SAWYER

You're not on another diet are you?

It's eight o'clock in the morning. CHLOE

Yeah? SAWYER

Too early for chocolate. CHLOE

That's like saying it's too early for a drink. SAWYER

It is. CHLOE

Philosophical differences. SAWYER

Our philosophical differences are that I don't want live like an animal. CHLOE

What's that supposed to mean? SAWYER

Nothing. CHLOE

No, tell me. SAWYER  
Nathan?

You cultivate a high level of entropy. NATHAN

Because I have a social life? SAWYER

You were lit this weekend. CHLOE

So were you. SAWYER

I've been really stressed. CHLOE  
Between school and work—

SAWYER

Me too. Taking pictures of fat people and their snotty kids  
picking their noses in front of some Giant Pandas  
would drive a saint to drink.

CHLOE

I actually have responsibility here.  
And I'm trying to just keep everything under control

SAWYER

I could've told him the rest of it.

NATHAN

What's the rest of it?

CHLOE

I don't remember.

SAWYER

You remember some of it.

*beat*

NATHAN

So, have you looked at the radar at all?  
Crazy, isn't it?

SAWYER

What?

NATHAN

It's mesmerizing.  
You can watch the storm heading straight for us.

CHLOE

You mean there's actually a storm?

NATHAN

What did you think I was talking about?

CHLOE

I thought you were being metaphorical.

NATHAN

It's been on the news.

CHLOE

If it's not panda reproduction or fish adaptations  
I haven't heard anything about it.

SAWYER

There's some big tropical. Thing. Headed our way.

NATHAN

Not big. Elephantine.

CHLOE

When?

NATHAN

End of the week.

CHLOE

Not soon enough to get me out of my exam.

SAWYER

It's not going to be that bad.

CHLOE

You haven't met my professor.

SAWYER

The storm.

NATHAN

Are you kidding?  
It's going to be a fucking force majeure.

SAWYER

I'm sorry. What were we.

NATHAN

Sawyer?

SAWYER  
*bewildered*

Yeah?

NATHAN

You all right?

SAWYER

What?  
I'm sorry. I forget what we were talking about.  
God?

*Chloe bolts up from her textbook.*

CHLOE

Shit.

NATHAN

Everything okay?

CHLOE

I was supposed to be at a meeting with the new panda nutritionist.

SAWYER

What happened to whatshername? The last one.

CHLOE

Nervous breakdown.  
See you guys later.

*She exits.  
Sawyer starts snapping photographs.  
Nathan attempts to sound casual  
but is fighting an anxiety attack*

NATHAN

What's up with Chloe?

SAWYER

She didn't have sex with Chase.

NATHAN

Oh. Did she want to?

SAWYER

Unclear. They're both acting like big pussies, so—  
I don't think feeding pandas is that stressful, do you?  
Why do you think whatshername had a nervous breakdown?  
I've always wanted to know what that feels like.  
To just. Submit. To inertia. I guess that's probably not—

NATHAN

Do you—would you put down your camera?

Sorry.

SAWYER

No it's fine, I just.

NATHAN

What?

SAWYER

Do you want to get dinner?

NATHAN

I heard there's an elephant coming.

SAWYER

Elephantine/ storm.

NATHAN

That was a joke—never mind.

SAWYER

Oh. Ha.  
Not until the end of the week.

NATHAN

I'm really busy right now.

SAWYER

Doing what?

NATHAN

What?

SAWYER

What are you busy doing?

NATHAN

Nathan, that's how someone lets you down easy.

SAWYER

But what if you didn't?

NATHAN

I um.

SAWYER

What do you do when you're not here?  
NATHAN

Like, take photographs?  
I don't just take souvenir pictures you know.  
I'm a real photographer.  
SAWYER

What do you take pictures of?  
NATHAN

Whatever I feel like.  
SAWYER

But you must find yourself drawn to something?  
NATHAN

I guess, I'm like interested in cages.  
SAWYER

Yeah?  
NATHAN

The cages we create for ourselves.  
SAWYER

Me too.  
NATHAN

Really?  
SAWYER

Foucault has some fascinating observations about imprisonment.  
NATHAN

I just meant that zoos are really cruel.  
SAWYER

You have to eat, right?  
I promise it won't be painful.  
Just pleasant banter. Good food.  
NATHAN

I don't—  
SAWYER

I know this really great Belgian place.  
NATHAN

*Chase enters carrying a bucket of panda shit.*

SAWYER

Tomorrow?

NATHAN

Shit. I have class.  
The night after?

*Sawyer looks at Chase.  
He stops to wipe panda shit off his shoe.*

SAWYER

Sure. Belgian sounds great.

*end scene*