

COWBELL vs. SADNESS in PUSHUP COURT

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ACT I

part one

*Part one. Lights, though mostly darkness. A grim place. COWBELL looks very nervous, uncertain, and sad. Unknowable dangers are afoot. Rats scuttle. Shadows scuttle. COWBELL has a slip of paper with an important name on it; he checks it, squinting in the dim light.*

COWBELL

Mister--Mister Leland?

*A voice responds from the darkness. It, too, is full of danger and mystery.*

LELAND

(booming, fearsome, etc.)

Who's asking? You the tax man?

COWBELL

No, sir.

LELAND

Then what in hell you want? This ain't fuckin' Kennywood. Only danger, here. Danger, and pain. Danger, and pain, and the void.

COWBELL

My name is Cowbell. Smokestack said I should find you, sir.

LELAND

Smokestack!

COWBELL

You see, I've just gone through a breakup.

LELAND

Is that right? You've got the Sorrows, is that it?

COWBELL

I think so, sir.

LELAND

See that box over there, kid?

*Lights. A box.*

COWBELL

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

LELAND

Yes what?!

COWBELL

Yes sir! I'm sorry, sir!

LELAND

You bring that fuckin' box in the back office...

*Lights. A doorway comes into view.*

LELAND

(cont.)

...and we'll see about a course of treatment for your Sorrows.

*COWBELL attempts to lift the box. It's too heavy. He struggles valiantly, but then gives up.*

COWBELL

What's in this?

LELAND

Ain't you figured it out?

COWBELL

No.

LELAND

Your Sorrows is in that box. It's a metaphor. Now we'll begin preparing you to lift it.

COWBELL

How?

LELAND

You any good at pushups?

COWBELL

No.

*LELAND appears from the back office.*

LELAND

I know. That's a metaphor too. Leave it. Come in my office and let's talk.

part two

*Lights. Heavy 70's prog rock like Deep Purple or Uriah Heep. LELAND is smoking a bowl. COWBELL, shirtless, barefoot, and drenched in sweat, is doing pushups with his feet elevated in LELAND's lap. LELAND slaps his feet.*

LELAND

Alright, now, those last ten were real nice. Ten more, just like them.

*COWBELL continues cranking out pushups. LELAND counts aloud. Get the audience to count, too. They love that shit.*

LELAND

One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Se-e-e-e-v-e----

*Number seven is just too much for COWBELL. He collapses, then struggles to his feet.*

COWBELL

Enough! No more! What is this? Smokestack said you were the one to see for Sorrows, but what does Smokestack know? Why did I do what he said? Did the Sorrows make me stupid as much as sad? Pushups can't cure me. You're the one who needs the help. I'm out, old man.

LELAND

Now you hold on just one fuckin' second. Fine. Maybe I'm changed. Maybe I'm meaner than I was back when Smokestack came to see me, alright, may-be. Now, why don't you take a breath and tell me the deal?

COWBELL

Even today, so many days and nights and other days and other nights removed, only a grain of me is here within this self, inside this room, upon this lost and drifting continent, for I have been cut in half. Half of me remains back there: another beach. Another night. Another moon, cutting itself to shreds. I laid upon my back, gazing up at her, the way her black hair wreathed her face against the yawning blue night. The next morning as I fumbled (as quiet as possible) to button my shirt and tie my tie, to go and meet the men who were waiting for me far away, the bus ride to the end of the line, I hurried, until you--she--stirred in sleep and beckoned me back, without completely waking--the red sheet twisted there. My remaining half was cut in half, and a quarter of me remained within this body; and every scene, every instant that I never wanted to leave trapped a half and a half and a half,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

COWBELL (cont'd)

and now what is left here is sliced down to comical, infinite smallness. Still those men are waiting, the glowing orange ends of their cigarettes as bright as always. It is not this place which is the abyss. It is the past which is the abyss. It is more frightful than darkness and oblivion because it is so vibrant; it is colorful; it is more alive than the present, and I am more there than here. All those shards of all this self can never be retrieved.

LELAND

Thank you for your story. You had completed six of a set of ten.

COWBELL

You're wrong, old man. We're done.

LELAND

All your life you've walked away from half-finished things, Cowbell, and your only gift is that you quickly forget you ever wanted more.

COWBELL

My heart's too heavy to lift with pushups. I've got the Sorrows, don't you know?

LELAND

That's the key, Cowbell. Feeling sad is like pushups... for your heart.

*COWBELL is convinced; he gets back in position. LELAND lights up his bowl. Get the audience to count while COWBELL does the pushups.*

LELAND

Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!!

*LELAND throws COWBELL's legs off his lap.*

LELAND

Now go out front, get that box, and bring it here.

*COWBELL exits. LELAND smokes. We hear COWBELL struggling with the box off-stage.*

LELAND

Come on now, lift with your back!

*COWBELL hoists the box of Sorrows over his head with a triumphant cry. He enters carrying it.*

(CONTINUED)

LELAND

You done alright, son. Now open that box.

*COWBELL opens the box. Inside it is a smaller box.*

COWBELL

What's in this box?

LELAND

That's the box of joys.

*COWBELL opens the box. Inside it is a smaller box.*

COWBELL

And this one?

LELAND

Pains.

*COWBELL opens the box. Inside it is a smaller box.*

COWBELL

And this one?

LELAND

Hopes.

*COWBELL opens the box.*

COWBELL

It's empty.

LELAND

It's not empty, Cowbell. It's full of pushups.

*End.*