

# The Ocean at Night

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Adapted for radio by Harold O. Wilson

## CHARASCTRS:

Mr. Zee / Zoltar

Bartender – Bobby

Young man – Max

Woman on bench -- Olivia

NARRATOR: Before Mr. Zee can settle onto the wooden barstool, Bobby has already wiped the counter and poured him a double vodka tonic on the rocks. He slides it now past several other patrons to this middle-aged man with the gold earrings and thick black moustache that curls up at the ends.

BOBBY: Nice night, Mr. Zee.

NARRATOR: Mr. Zee glances toward the darkening ocean, nods his bald head and raises his glass. His motions are slow and formal.

MR. ZEE: Your health, Bobby, may you live long life.

NARRATOR: His accent is Eastern European... maybe Mediterranean. Bobby has asked the guy a hundred times where he's from, but the answer is always the same: *everywhere*.

Judging by how much he spends and how often he comes in—almost every night—Bobby figures he’s got money. Could be a Russian businessman, involved in import/export. Or maybe he’s mixed up in something sinister—hence the secrecy.

Whatever the explanation, he leaves great tips, so Bobby is happy to have him. On a lot of nights, the guy stays until closing, watching people on the boardwalk, looking at the ocean, or talking with half-drunk customers. Some nights, he wanders off to visit the handful of other bars on the boardwalk. All the regulars know him, but no one seems to know much about him.

MR. ZEE: Will be storm tonight... wind is coming up.

NARRATOR: Mr. Zee sips his drink and follows the last few minutes of a beach volleyball game under the floodlights. Then again he stares at the black ocean and the tattered clouds passing over the moon.

MR ZEE: Air is heavy ... dense.

NARRATOR: Mr. Zee turns now to observe a young man settling at the bar two stools down. The young man scowls, his shoulders hunched, his blue eyes wet, rimmed red.

MAX: Bourbon, neat.

MR. ZEE: Ah, you desire to get drunk quickly, young man.

MAX: I’m really not here to talk.

MR: ZEE: Try rum in Diet Coca-Cola. Carbonated, no sugar. That will intoxicate the most fast. I read, study. Bobby, A rum and Diet Coke for this man. On me. Your best.

BOBBY: You got it, Zee.

MAX: Thanks, but I don't need it.

NARRATOR: Mr. Zee moves next to the young man.

MR. ZEE: There is woman, yes? Always, there is woman. Who is she, this woman? I can tell your bond with her is strong, or you would not need to drown yourself.

NARRATOR: The young man looks at the bartender for help. Bobby pretends to be busy washing a glass.

MAX: Look, I don't want to talk about it right now.

MR. ZEE: I was in love more than once...Two times, it was.

NARRATOR: The young man doesn't want to encourage this odd stranger, so he remains quiet, stares at his drink.

MR. ZEE: I loved first one so much, I thought I could not live without her. When she left, almost I did not go on. What kept me going? Do you know what was it kept me going?

NARRATOR: As the young man downs his bourbon, he realizes he's too tired to fight.

Max: No, what was it kept you going?

MR. ZEE: Curiosity. Yes, it is curiosity kept me going.

MAX: Curiosity?

MR. ZEE: I was not done with world and world was not done with me. As much as I wanted this woman, I knew world was bigger than anything I could imagine. End of one thing always

beginning of another. You are young. I think world is not through with you. Are you not curious to see what happens?

MAX: Curious? What happens? It would be easier if she left me. Maybe we should just stop trying.

MR. ZEE: What is name young man? You are called....

MAX: My name is Max.

MR. ZEE: Max...Strong name is Max... beloved one. Do you love her Max, this woman?

NARRATOR: Max closes his eyes and squeezes his forehead.

MAX: Yes...I love her so much it scares me. But we keep failing. I can't give her the one thing she wants more than anything. She thinks I blame her.

MR. ZEE: Why are you here, at beach?

MAX: We were sure this time...We were going to celebrate.

MR. ZEE: And now you cannot celebrate anymore?

NARRATOR: Max grabs the rum and Coke Bobby hands him.

MAX: No...no celebrations.

MR. ZEE: Whatever you have lost, you must find way to persevere. You think this is end of story together?... Perhaps...but perhaps not.

NARRATOR: Max looks more closely at the swarthy man with eyes that seem old and young at the same time.

MAX: It can't be the end. I just don't know where we go next. What we do.

MR. ZEE: Is easy... I tell you. Take her red rose. Sit together in front of ocean at midnight. Speak fears you have into wind. Can you do that? You can do that.

NARRATOR: Max is starting to feel drunk, his nose numb and the edges of his vision soft. He thinks this Mr. Zee must be crazy, but he'll humor him.

MAX: Yes, I guess I can do that.

MR. ZEE: Then you move forward. Sit together in front of ocean at midnight. Speak fears into wind and you move forward.

NARRATOR: Before Max can say anything, Mr. Zee stands and throws a hundred-dollar bill onto the bar.

BOBBY: Change, Mr. Zee?

MR. ZEE: No. Cover tab of young man here.

BOBBY: Got it, Mr. Zee. Calling it a night?

MR. ZEE: Perhaps...perhaps not. Time to move on.

NARRATOR: Outside, in the misty darkness, Mr. Zee strolls the boardwalk. And then he finds her... Max's young woman. She at the south end of the boardwalk, well beyond Funland. She is alone.

How does he know who she is? Before he reaches her, he feels her profound sadness. Her sorrow is so raw, it almost stops Mr. Zee in his tracks. Wide-open emptiness. Despair mindless as the

sea. Aching without end. Emotions Mr. Zee has not felt for a very long time.

She's sitting on the white bench, facing the ocean; her cropped black hair is blowing across her face. Mr. Zee clears his throat, careful not to startle her.

MR. ZEE: Excuse me, miss. Do you have, um, tissue or napkin?"

NARRATOR: The woman, maybe thirty, looks over at him hazily. If she were not lost in grief, she would be more nervous about this strange man approaching her in the shadowy darkness, darkness muted only by the thin light of the activity on the boardwalk.

OLIVIA: Uh, maybe. Let me look.

NARRATOR: She unzips a shapeless cotton bag and rummages around.

OLIVIA: Here take this one.

NARRATOR: Mr. Zee takes it from her and blows his nose loudly.

MR. ZEE: Excuse me. Something there is about these salty breezes...Do you mind if I sit... one moment is all? I have long walk back.

OLIVIA: Go ahead. I was just leaving.

MR. ZEE: May I first ask something... before you go?"

OLIVIA: Sure, ask if you wish.

MR. ZEE: Do you think ocean at night is good or bad?

NARRATOR: She wonders why this weird old man had to bother her tonight of all nights. Maybe she should just walk away. Get up and walk away, she tells herself. But instead, she gazes across the sea to the line, the demarcation where the water meets the sky. She can barely make it out.

OLIVIA: It's not one or the other. It just is.

MR. ZEE: Ah, yes. I agree. But this is favorite time on boardwalk for me. Sun is gone. Moon plays on waves. Children are home, dreaming. So beautiful. So quiet. You cannot tell lie when looking at ocean at night. Did you know?

NARRATOR: There is silence now, enhanced by the soft murmur of the sea. The woman shakes her head and wipes away a tear with the back of her hand.

MR. ZEE: You have lost something, yes?

OLIVIA: Yes. Two times now.

MR. ZEE: Ah... it is child you want.

OLIVIA: How did you know?

MR. ZEE: I know many things...many things. I know joy, but I know sadness too. I have lost things. Things lost when I came to this county... and people too...so many people are lost to me when I came. I had to learn to persevere. Now I watch.

OLIVIA: What's your name?

MR. ZEE: I am called Mr. Zee. Your name is?

OLIVIA: Olivia. I am called Olivia.

MR. ZEE: Ah, Olivia, peace and fertility, yes even fertility. That is lovely name for you.

NARRATOR: Olivia doesn't know why she's talking so openly to this stranger about their losses, the stupid attempts they keep hanging every hope on. But she feels comfortable with this man. His gentle manner, and his rich, deep voice are soothing.

Olivia: It's my fault. I waited too long. My eggs are old or bad or something... We don't care about money. We don't want fame or power or even a big house. Just a baby. It should be easy.

MR. ZEE: Where is husband?

OLIVIA: We had a fight. I think I'm driving him away.

MR. ZEE: Do you love him?

OLIVIA: Yes, but I don't know if it's enough. You know...

MR. ZEE: Say good-bye.

OLIVIA: I don't want to let him go.

MR. ZEE: Not to husband... to children. Say good-bye to children who left. Did you say good-bye to children who left?

NARRATOR: Olivia likes this man, his face, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, the gentle smile lines around his mouth, even the small gold hoops in his ears. Before she can protest, he takes her hand and pulls her up. They walk to the closest path down to the sand.



MR. ZEE: Come, Olivia, let ocean take sadness away.

NARRATOR: Olivia doesn't believe the ocean has this power, but she goes anyway. She kicks off her flip-flops and lets her feet sink in the cool sand, thinks how Max will scold her when she tells him she went to the water with a strange man.

Then her feet are wet. She lets the waves wash around her ankles. Mr. Zee stands back while she talks to the night, to the moon, to the constant motion of the sea. She thinks how nothing ever stays the same. How the waves write upon the sand, erase what they have written, and write again.

OLIVIA: I love you, my little ones. I will love you forever.  
Good-by...good-by.

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NARRATOR: The next morning, Max and Olivia splurge on breakfast at The Boardwalk Plaza Hotel. Max eats ravenously, like he always does when he has a hangover. Even though his head is pounding, he feels cleansed. A family of four waves at them from a bicycle surrey as they roll by. Olivia sips her coffee and thinks about how ridiculous Max looked last night when he finally came crashing into their hotel room, plastered, with a plastic rose he had obviously stolen from a Grotto's table.

He had insisted they go back to the beach and sit near the water together. He said she needed to tell the wind her fears. She had blabbered something just to shut him up. Then, back at the hotel, they had crawled into bed together.

It was the first time in three days. Afterward, they slept curled against each other, calm and quiet, no anger, no tears. As they

drifted off, a wild storm let loose, leaving the sea air light and fresh in the morning.

Max doesn't mention the strange guy from the bar and Olivia doesn't mention the man who led her to the ocean. They both wonder if maybe they imagined him as they stroll along a boardwalk that looks so much different today than it did yesterday. All the same stores and benches and dunes are there, but the shadows are not quite so dark. The growing crowd seems less annoying.

They pass Dolle's and the gazebo, then the ice cream shop and displays of hermit crabs in their cages. In their newfound closeness, Max and Olivia feel fragile... sea creatures without their shells. Olivia squints inside the arcade as they pass. A familiar voice makes her jump.

MR. ZEE: Give to Zoltar your treasure. I have much wisdom to share with you.

OLIVIA: Oh my god, it's the creepy fortune teller. He scared me.

MAX: I remember this guy. Hey, Zoltar, what's up?

OLIVIA: Honey, he can't hear you, you know.

MAX: Come on... Want to know your fortune?

OLIVIA: Oh, max, they're always so lame.

MAX: Hey, watch it, you're gonna hurt Zoltar's feelings.

NARRATOR: Olivia steps closer to the mannequin in its old-fashioned wooden case. Zoltar looks like a gypsy—the thick

black mustache, gold earrings, turban. He seems familiar... probably from all their visits to the shore.

Max inserts a dollar bill and waits. Zoltar waves his mechanical hand over the crystal ball and a ticket pops out below.

OLIVIA: What does it say, Max?

NARRATOR: Max looks down at the ticket, and then back at the mechanical Zoltar.

MAX: No way. There's no way.

OLIVIA: Max, what? What is it?

NARRATOR: Max takes Olivia's face in his hands and kisses her lips, then hands her the ticket. He watches her eyes get big as she reads...

*OLIVIA: Perseverance is the key. Your lucky number is three.*