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A BIRD IS NOT A PET

A Tragic Act of Separation or A Comic Act of Desperation

BY REBECCA RYLAND

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A BIRD IS NOT A PET

A Tragic Act of Separation or A Comic Act of Desperation

By REBECCA RYLAND

3 Women/1 Man

Setting:

The Foyer of a Condo Clubhouse

Characters:

The Woman

The Man

The Secretary

The Blond Woman

Warning: *Gunshot*

A BIRD IS NOT A PET

A Tragic Act of Separation or A Comic Act of Desperation

by Rebecca Ryland

(AT RISE: The foyer of a Clubhouse; an office indicated. What furnishings seen are tastefully modern, accented with exotic plants and exquisite artwork. A handsome wooden desk separates the waiting area from the office. THE WOMAN enters, apparently frustrated and agitated. THE MAN is seen moving about the office. THE WOMAN waits to be recognized. THE MAN does not come forward. He looks at her then turns away. She waits. No one else approaches. THE MAN looks about. She waits. Finally he speaks.)

THE MAN

Someone will be with you.

(THE WOMAN nods stiffly.)

THE MAN

(Loudly) Some woman in a tizzy over something or other.

(THE SECRETARY approaches.)

THE SECRETARY

May I help you?

THE WOMAN

That all depends on whether you have any authority to *do* anything.

THE SECRETARY

Why don't you tell me what the problem is and then I will tell you if I do.

THE WOMAN

I have been to this office four times to ask what I may do with my trash. I have been to this office four times to ask if I may separate my trash and no one I talked to could tell me.

THE SECRETARY

No you may not.

THE WOMAN

The last time I came I was told that I could. My son— this is very important to him. He went to all the bins and gathered the papers lying on the ground. He stacked them together. He put them with ours. He put the glass and the plastics together, and the tin. All separate— to help the old man when he picks up the trash. But while my son waits for the old man to come, they came and threw out our trash. They came and they threw it in

THE WOMAN, *Continued*

the back of the cart. My son yelled, 'Hey, where are you taking our trash?!' A man in the cart shrugged his shoulders and then they just took it away.

(THE MAN is listening.)

THE SECRETARY

I don't know who said you could do that. As far as I know you can't do that here. Who said you could?

THE WOMAN

The woman with the blond hair. The only person here who ever seems to be able to do anything.

THE MAN

What woman is that?

THE WOMAN

The woman with the blond hair! The tall woman who works here!

THE MAN

Calm down before you have a stroke. You can talk to here yourself in a minute.

THE WOMAN

My son followed the cart as fast as he could. He saw them throw our trash in the big dumpster down by the car wash, the one that the City picks up and takes to the County Dispose-All.

THE BLOND WOMAN

(Entering) May I help you?

THE WOMAN

I have come to this office four times to find out what I may do with my trash. You tell me the old man who picks up the trash separates what he can and if I would do ours it would help him. And my son and I did. My son, who cares, even picked up the papers thrown by the bins and put them with ours and divided the bottles and plastics and tin. He looked away just for a moment and now they've taken our trash and they've hauled it away.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Who are *they*?

THE WOMAN

The men in the golf cart. In the work cart. The men who work here.

THE BLOND WOMAN

I told you we don't do that here. I told you the old man who picks up the trash does it on his own.

THE WOMAN

I understand that. And you told me if I separated mine it would help him.

THE BLOND WOMAN

He comes every day.

THE WOMAN

You told me if I separated my trash he would take it.

THE BLOND WOMAN

The old man does not work here. I cannot control what the old man will do.

THE WOMAN

I understand that.

THE BLOND WOMAN

If you spoke Spanish you could ask him yourself.

THE WOMAN

And now they've taken the trash my son and I separated and they've thrown it in the garbage!

THE BLOND WOMAN

They! They! Who are *They*?! What do you want me to do about it?

THE WOMAN

I want you to give me my trash!

THE MAN

Stop screaming.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Do you own your unit or rent?

THE WOMAN

I rent.

THE MAN

(Condescendingly.) Of course.

THE WOMAN

That would make a difference? If I owned you would give me my trash?

THE BLOND WOMAN

What do you want me to do? Do you want me to go get your garbage? You want me to climb in the dumpster and go through the trash? I'm not crawling through any dumpster.

THE WOMAN

I do not expect you to crawl in the dumpster. I want the men who took it to give me my trash and I will take it to the old man myself.

THE MAN

This isn't the end of the world.

THE WOMAN

Yes it is. (*THE MAN chuckles. THE WOMAN pulls out a gun and shoots THE MAN.*) I take this very seriously.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Yes, it is very important. If it were up to me we would do it. No one has brought it up to the Board.

THE WOMAN

I have been to this office four times.

THE SECRETARY

You must bring it before the Board.

THE WOMAN

And what should I do, write a letter? And bring a copy of Ordinance 2010?

THE SECRETARY

That might help.

THE WOMAN

(*Referring to THE MAN bleeding.*) I'm sorry about the rug.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Yes, we just finished redecorating.

THE WOMAN

For whom?

THE BLOND WOMAN

For the people who live here.

THE WOMAN

You build a Clubhouse with a sliding glass door that opens onto the deck of a pool but no one can enter in a bathing suit.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Yes, but swimming is not allowed here.

THE WOMAN

You fill the upstairs with game tables and Ping-Pong and cue sticks and marbles but children are not permitted to play here.

THE BLOND WOMAN

They break the paddles and lose the balls.

THE WOMAN

Yesterday a man shoved a gun in a little girl's face. She told him to shoot.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Yes, there is nothing for children to do here.

THE WOMAN

And today a little boy was dragged across the pavement by his neck because a man said he threw a rock at his window.

THE BLOND WOMAN

We keep a file.

THE WOMAN

He didn't do it.

THE BLOND WOMAN

(Looking in file.) The boy takes medicine.

THE WOMAN

Someone was fighting downstairs in my building last night. I was afraid to go out in the hall.

THE BLOND WOMAN

This is the first I have heard about it.

THE SECRETARY

No one filed a complaint.

THE WOMAN

I called the police.

THE BLOND WOMAN

This is the first I have heard of it.

THE WOMAN

A man found six spent gun shells in the second floor laundry room.

THE SECRETARY

No one filed a complaint.

THE WOMAN

I just want to know what is going on around here?!

THE BLOND WOMAN

This is the first I have heard about it.

THE WOMAN

I read books. I was once noted 'Head of My Class.' I make my bed every morning. I cook leftovers on Mondays and Tuesdays and Wednesdays. I want my trash. I am trying to live.

THE SECRETARY

No one complained.

THE WOMAN

Men die to protect my right to live and no one complains.

THE BLOND WOMAN

What do you want?

THE WOMAN

I want to use the Clubhouse.

THE BLOND WOMAN

We require a four thousand-dollar deposit.

THE WOMAN

I want to celebrate the New Year.

THE SECRETARY

What night would you like to reserve?

THE WOMAN

New Year's Eve.

THE SECRETARY

You're in luck. The Clubhouse is open that day. Sign here that you will be responsible for all damages. Make the check payable to The Board. The Board will have to approve your request. The deposit is non-refundable. The Clubhouse closes at Noon.

THE WOMAN

But I want to celebrate the New Year.

THE BLOND WOMAN

The New Year is over.

THE WOMAN

It was a terrible New Year. Yesterday I mailed in my census. It asked “How many ounces of alcohol are consumed in my home each day? One? Less than ten? Less than fifteen?” I answered, ‘More than fifteen.’ I don’t drink. It asked ‘What is your spouse’s occupation? Professional? Statistical? Bureaucritical?’ I wrote ‘Unavailable.’ It asked if I was married or single and I said ‘Detached’. It asked how many people live in your household and I said ‘Thirteen’ but I live alone.

THE BLOND WOMAN

(Paying no attention. To THE SECRETARY.) Go get the stain remover.

THE SECRETARY

Where will I find it?

THE BLOND WOMAN

Ask the old man who cleans here.

THE SECRETARY

I asked him four times where he keeps it.

THE BLOND WOMAN

If you spoke Spanish he would tell you.

THE WOMAN

I have some in my unit.

THE BLOND WOMAN

What do you want?!

THE WOMAN

I want my trash. My son, who cares, took the time to gather the newspapers blowing in the complex—

THE BLOND WOMAN

Your son. We have a file on your son.

THE WOMAN

There is nothing for children to do here.

THE BLOND WOMAN

(Looking in file.) He slashed several tires.

THE WOMAN

With what?

THE BLOND WOMAN

With nails.

THE WOMAN

What kind of nails?

THE BLOND WOMAN

Yellow nails.

THE WOMAN

My son does not have yellow nails.

THE BLOND WOMAN

The boy in unit 1245 has yellow nails.

THE WOMAN

The boy in unit 1245 is not my son. They are friends. His father beats him.

THE BLOND WOMAN

You allow your son to play with boys who are beaten by their fathers?

THE WOMAN

I told him if he ever needs a place to go—

THE BLOND WOMAN

You are irresponsible.

THE SECRETARY

Nothing good will come of this.

THE BLOND WOMAN

He has handcuffs and guns.

THE WOMAN

His mother is a policeman. His father beats him.

THE BLOND WOMAN

He has yellow nails. Your son was seen with him.

THE WOMAN

I tell him not to play with him.

THE SECRETARY

We had a complaint.

THE BLOND WOMAN

From whom?!

THE SECRETARY

The man with the little boy.

THE BLOND WOMAN

The one that takes medicine?

THE SECRETARY

No, the one that tears out the water sprinklers. He says no one will play with the boy.

THE WOMAN

The boy said he was going to kill them.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Them? Them? Who are Them?!

THE WOMAN

The other children. He told me to get fucked. His father laughed.

THE BLOND WOMAN

(Looking in file.) It isn't his father.

THE WOMAN

He carries a gun. He dragged a boy across the pavement who said he didn't throw the rock that hit his window.

THE SECRETARY

The boy who takes medicine?

THE WOMAN

Yes. The police came.

THE BLOND WOMAN

This is the first I have heard of it.

THE WOMAN

My son saw the whole thing.

THE BLOND WOMAN

(*To THE SECRETARY.*) Get me the file on her son.

THE SECRETARY

I don't know where it is.

THE BLOND WOMAN

It's next to the stain remover on the bottom shelf next to the six spent gun shells and the Spanish Dictionary. (*Indicating THE MAN.*) You'll need to move him.

THE WOMAN

I know what it says. He found the man's underwear lying on the hallway floor. He thought it belonged to her. That's why he hung them on her door.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Her husband is dead. (*Taking the file from THE SECRETARY.*) He broke two slats out of a utility room door on the third floor.

THE WOMAN

He locked himself in.

THE BLOND WOMAN

He climbs trees.

THE WOMAN

He's a child.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Children are not allowed in this complex. This Club is for adults only.

THE WOMAN

I have no children. My son is dead.

THE BLOND WOMAN

We allow no pets.

THE WOMAN

The fish drowned and the cat flew away. We flushed the dog down the drain. A bird is not a pet.

THE BLOND WOMAN

You have a car.

THE WOMAN

I have two cars.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Your permit is expired.

THE WOMAN

Which one?

THE BLOND WOMAN

Either or both. Is it important?

THE WOMAN

(To THE SECRETARY.) I need a new sticker.

THE SECRETARY

What building are you in?

THE WOMAN

Four thousand and four.

THE SECRETARY

What unit?

THE WOMAN

Two thousand and ten.

THE SECRETARY

(Checking.) You cannot renew you permit.

THE WOMAN

Which one?

THE SECRETARY

Either one or both. Your lease is expired.

THE WOMAN

The lease is for fifty years and by the decade thereafter.

THE SECRETARY

Fifty years is the minimum.

THE WOMAN

It says fifty years.

THE SECRETARY

And by the decade thereafter. This lease is invalid.

(THE SECRETARY shows the lease to THE BLOND WOMAN.)

THE BLOND WOMAN

You must file a new lease in two days or your car will be towed.

THE WOMAN

Which one?

THE BLOND WOMAN

The blue one and the red one.

THE WOMAN

I paid for two stickers but I have only one parking space.

THE BLOND WOMAN

You are permitted only one.

THE WOMAN

But I have two cars.

THE BLOND WOMAN

You are permitted fifteen. One is expired.

THE WOMAN

The guard at the gate never told me.

THE BLOND WOMAN

You must buy a guest sticker.

THE WOMAN

But I live here.

THE BLOND WOMAN

Do you rent or own?

THE WOMAN

I own.

THE SECRETARY

The lease says the owner lives in Manhattan.

THE WOMAN

I rent from the woman in Manhattan. I am the owner.

THE BLOND WOMAN

She must sign a new lease tomorrow or the guard will turn you away. Now, is there something I can do for you?

THE WOMAN

I want back my trash.

THE BLOND WOMAN

And what do you want me to do? You want me to climb in the dumpster and crawl around in the garbage and—

THE WOMAN

They took it away in the work cart. The little golf cart with the wooden box on back.

THE BLOND WOMAN

They! They! Who are They?!

THE WOMAN

The men who work here. You know who they are. Now, I want you to tell them I separated my trash. I put the papers together and the bottles and the plastics in one container and the tin in another. It isn't much but it's important to me. I want my trash back.

THE BLOND WOMAN

(To THE SECRETARY.) Try and reach them on the radio. *(Referring to THE MAN.)* It's in his pocket.

THE SECRETARY

I don't speak Spanish.

THE WOMAN

Tell them I'm going to get my car— the brown one— and I'll meet them over at the dumpster next to the car wash, the one they use for the garbage they take to the County Dispose-All. I want them to get out my trash and put it in my car and then I will give it to the old man who separates it. Tell them I'm waiting at the dumpster. Tell them it's our duty to separate our trash so that men will have something to die for.

(THE WOMAN exits.)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes