

Little Bird

A Ten-Minute Play

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Content Warning

Sexual themes. Child loss; discussion of death of a child.

Little Bird

Early, misty and frosty morning. A businessman reads that morning's Financial Times sitting on a park bench. The bench has a plaque. There are ambient sounds. A woman, unsuitably dressed and a little disorientated enters and sits. The man moves to the opposite end. They are both wearing wedding rings. A blackbird tweets.

Woman: Blackbird. I think it's a blackbird.

Man: ...

Woman: I always heard them first. When the alarm used to go off – I'd open the curtain – blackbird. Pecking at the ground. I'd hear theng.

The baritone. There was something soothing in it, something safe. Like waking up to strong arms lifting you from under the covers.

Man: ... *(shifts)*

Woman: That's gone now. *(The blackbird tweets again)* Now all that baritone reminds me of is a throat that swallows things whole.

Silence.

She faces the man and then gulps loudly and deliberately. He finally looks up. She opens her mouth widely. He leans slightly. She snaps it shut. She sits to face the front. The man folds up his paper.

Man: What do you want?

Woman: What do I want?

Man: What do you want?

Woman: What do *you* want?

Man: Peace. And quiet.

Woman: Is that why you sit in the freezing cold? For peace?

Man: ...

Woman: Don't you have a home to go to?

Man: Don't you?

Woman: ...

(Beat)

Max: Did you not think to wear a jacket?

Woman: A real gentleman offers a lady his jacket when it's cold out.

Man: Those days are behind us, Clem.

Clem: Are they?

Man: What are you doing here?

Clem: I've as much right to be here as anyone.

Man: You haven't been up this early for a while.

Clem: I haven't been to bed yet.

It's hard to sleep in a bed so cold, Max.

(Beat)

Max: Go home, Clem. Get some sleep.

Clem: Come with me.

Max: No.

Clem: Please.

Max: No.

Clem: Please!

Max: I have to work.

Clem: I need your heat. I need you. Please.

Max: ...

Clem: Come home and...

Clem attempts to initiate sexual affection from Max; his response is immediate but ambiguous. There is an intense emotional (maybe physical) push-pull; they get close until -

Max: Have you been drinking?

Clem: ...

Max: You don't drink.

Clem: I have a husband who'd rather read the Financial Times than fuck his wife.

Max: You know it's not as simple as that.

Clem: You can get pills.

Max: I don't need pills.

Clem: Gels –

Max: No –

Clem: Creams –

Max: Stop! Stop it.

You're a cruel woman.

Clem: Cruel?

Max: Yes. You're cruel.

Clem: You walk around our house like a ghost. When I reach out a hand for you it just falls right through.

Max: Ever the fucking poet, aren't you Clem?

(Beat)

I can't deal with this. Today of all days.

Clem: *You* can't deal with it?

Max: Not everything is about you - I'm trying to keep a roof over our heads. How do you contribute?

Clem: Why?

Max: Why?

Clem: Why do you bother trying to keep a roof over our heads? Why not just let it cave in and crush us?

Max: That's... ungrateful.

Clem: Don't you dare try and tell me I'm the only one suffocating.

Max: You need to find a way to deal with it.

Clem: Like you have? You bury yourself in work, avoid being in the house – avoid...

(Beat)

You haven't said her name. In so long.

Do you even remember it?

Max: Of course I remember it!

Clem: Say it then.

Say our daughter's name.

Say it!

Max: ...

Clem: Olivia! Her name was Olivia.

OLIVIA!

Max: I know her fucking name, Clem.

Clem: Then say her fucking name.

(Pause)

Max: No.

Clem: You're a coward. A fucking coward. *(She spits at him).*

(Silence)

She sits down, defeated. After a moment he sits down.

Do you remember her spaghetti picture?

(Beat)

At Nursery. They were making pictures with dried food and she'd made a portrait of you – your beard was made of macaroni and your eyes were all squint and she'd used upturned rigatoni for your nostrils. *(Laughs)* They were so big!

Max: *(Chuckles)* My nostrils aren't even that big!

Clem: She looked up to you. I suppose from that angle they must have been.

Max: She'd snapped spaghetti and stuck it on to the top of my head for my hair.

Clem: You'd spend ages in the morning getting the tips just right.

Max: It was the fashion back then. All boybands and gel hair products.

Clem: I used to call you "My little –

Max: - Hedgehog".

We kept that picture for years. The pasta was holding on for dear life by the end.

Clem: Kind of how we are.

(Beat)

She found it in the bin.

Max: I remember.

Clem: She was so upset.

Max: I remember.

Clem: Daddy's little girl.

We should have kept it in a box. I wish we'd kept all the little things in a box.

All the mundane things.

Max: We kept her medals.

Clem: All the things we got sick of looking at.

Max: We never could have known, Clem.

Clem: Don't you think we could have?

Max: No.

Clem: I miss her.

Max: I miss her, too.

(Silence)

Clem: She's in a box now. Eight years old. Dead and buried and rotting in the ground.

We should have had her cremated. Scattered her ashes somewhere as beautiful as she was.

Max: She was scared of fire.

Clem: It's all I see.

I Googled it. How long bodies take to decompose.

It's all I see.

Max: Christ, Clem.

Clem: What else am I supposed to do?

Max: I don't know how to help you.

(Silence)

Max: Will we ever get past this?

(Beat)

Clem: No.

She slips off her wedding ring and places it on the bench. Max watches and then does the same.

Clem: We need to learn to live again.

(A blackbird tweets)

Max: For Olivia.

Clem: For Olivia.

END