

Aquarium

By

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Lights up on Jim, a 28-year old man with an air of confidence, a mind full of regrets, and the eyes of a hopeful youth. He stands alone talking into a cell phone. He wears a black suit and tie with a shoulder bag resting at his side. He leaves a voicemail.

JIM

Hey Maura, can you give the phone to Reed? This message is for her. Thanks... Happy birthday baby girl! Lucky 7 years old! How does it feel? Ah, save it. I'm a voicemail right now. You can tell me all about it when I get there. I'm closing up things here at the office and I'll be on my way in just a little bit! You are going to love your gift! But--

Lights fade out on Jim and lights up on Cary and Maura in the private room of an aquarium, setting party favors with an aquatic theme on a long banquet table. Cary is a straight-laced man without charm, but not without passion, while Maura is far more beautiful and free-spirited than her fish-print dress implies. They continue to set the party favors in silence before the phone rings. Maura looks at the phone, sighs, silences it, and then puts it away.

MAURA

Jim.

CARY

Great.

MAURA

Right?

CARY

Probably calling to let you know that he'll be late again, as always. Or better yet, that he won't even show up at all.

MAURA

Yeah, that would be great except it would break Reed's heart not to see her dad today.

CARY

I'm here. I'm on-time, early more often than not, and--

MAURA

Look Cary, I know where this is going. You are an amazing man and a great role model for Reed, but there will always be a special place in every little girl's heart for her father.

CARY

How about a step-father?

MAURA

Cary.

CARY

Alright.

They continue to set the table in silence for a moment.

CARY

I like your dress.

MAURA

Stop.

CARY

Really, I like it, I think it is very...

MAURA

Fishy?

CARY

I was going to say appropriate. And beautiful, but that should go without saying.

Lights out on the couple and lights back up on Jim who has taken off his suit coat and is now putting on a black leather jacket. Jim continues the voicemail.

JIM

You're going to love your gift, but I don't have it with me. Don't worry though, I'm having it specially delivered as we speak! It will arrive about the same time I do, which will be in about 9 minutes! Exciting right? Anyway, have fun at the aquarium with Mom and Cary until I get there okay? But don't--

Lights out on Jim and lights come back on the party room. Cary and Maura are finished setting the table and are now sitting on the tabletop waiting in silence. Maura is looking at her phone.

MAURA

God dammit Jim.

CARY

What did his message say?

MAURA

I didn't listen to it yet.

CARY

Why not?

MAURA

Because I don't want to hear his stupid voice? His bullshit excuses? Because each word that is not "I'm parking right now" is going to cause me to tense up?

CARY

Want me to listen to it for you?

MAURA

GOD NO. Jesus, why would you even suggest that?

CARY

It's not that crazy. We've been dating now for almost 2 years and we should share everything just like we share the pleasure of raising Reed. Her emotional well-being is our shared responsibility.

MAURA

Shared? No, no, no, she's my responsibility and her "emotional well-being" is my job. I'm her mother and I'll protect her from any of the irresponsible bullshit Jim pulls.

CARY

By not listening to his voicemail?

MAURA

Yes. By not listening to his voicemail. Besides, that would be a total violation of Jim's trust, knowing you, of all people, heard something that was intended only for me.

CARY

His trust? Like he cares about yours? Or Reed's for that matter? Breaking promises, bailing on plans, outright lying?

MAURA

Yes. Look, just because Jim doesn't keep his word doesn't make him a bad person and it doesn't make him an unfit--

CARY

An unfit father? How does this kind of attendance record make him a fit father then? He only knows his daughter through your Facebook updates and self-ers.

Maura digs in her purse looking for a cigarette. She finds one and starts to walk over to the back while lighting it.

MAURA

Selfies.

CARY

Whatever. Besides Jim can't even... Maura, you said you were going to quit.

MAURA

I did quit. It sucked.

CARY

You shouldn't be smoking in here, it's bad--

MAURA

It's fine. Look at all these vent thingies, it's fine.

CARY

Well you could start a--

MAURA

What a fire? We're underground. In an aquarium. We are literally surrounded by water and dirt. We are in the best possible place for a fire! Relax, nothing bad is going to happen.

Lights out on Maura and Cary.
Lights up on Jim who is now wearing his leather jacket and riding boots continuing his voicemail.

JIM

Have fun at the aquarium with Mom and Cary until I get there okay? But don't have too much fun without me! I'll protect you from the big bad sharks with my super-daddy-shield! Nothing can hurt you while I am around, my baby girl. Happy birthday. I love you forever after. Okay--

Lights out on Jim. Lights back up on Cary and Maura. Maura continues to smoke while Cary fans the smoke away with a paper party plate.

CARY

You should put that out. The kids will be back from the petting zoo soon.

MAURA

Fine, fine, fine.

Maura puts the cigarette out on the bottom of her shoe then pockets the butt.

MAURA

I'm just a little stressed out about this whole thing.

Maura sits and Cary walks up behind her and starts to rub her shoulders.

CARY

I know. I know.

MAURA

It's so funny, Reed didn't even want anything for her birthday. When I asked her what she wanted, do you know what she said? "More Time".

CARY

What?

MAURA

I know, right? What kind of kid says that? 7-going-on 70.

CARY

Wow. Did she say what she needed the time to do?

MAURA

She did... but I can't remember.

CARY

Ah.

The phone rings. Maura answers immediately.

MAURA

Hello? Yes, this is Maura. Okay, I'll come up and get it. Thanks, bye.

CARY

Jim?

MAURA

Kind of. Jim's gift was just dropped off up front. I'll go get it.

She exits leaving Cary alone on stage. Cary pulls out a small box from his pocket and opens it to reveal a small engagement ring. He positions the ring then closes it and returns it to his pocket. Maura returns holding a large gift bag. She tosses it on the table, messing up the table and party supplies.

CARY

What is it?

MAURA

Guess. Try. You'll never believe it.

CARY

Is it Jim? I'd never believe him!

She stares at him, not smiling at his joke.

MAURA

Motorcycle gear. For Reed. Children's jacket, boots, helmet, the whole get-up.

CARY

If he thinks I'm going to let my Reed ride on the back of his motorcycle, he's insane.

MAURA

Cary stop. It's fine. I'll tell her it's a Halloween costume or something.

Cary sits next to Maura on the table and looks at his watch.

CARY

I guess this means Jim's not going to make it.

MAURA

Figures. I'm not sure what I expected--

CARY

You should get full custody.

Lights out on them and lights up on Jim continuing his voicemail. He is now holding a motorcycle helmet.

JIM

I love you forever after. Okay, now hand the phone back to Mommy. Maura, I'm sorry, but I'm on my way now. Promise! Don't freak out when you see her gift. I Googled it and it's totally safe. We'll be safe. And hey, I know you asked me to stop saying this, and I will stop. In front of Cary anyway. I'll stop saying it when it stops being true. I love you too. Forever after.

Jim hangs up the phone and puts on his helmet then exits. Lights change to Cary and Maura again.

MAURA

...What?

CARY

Limited visitation.

MAURA

What are you saying?

CARY

I'm saying you should limit the amount of time you expose your daughter to the pain of having a negligent father.

MAURA

Oh, so I should solve the problem of her not seeing her dad enough by taking away her dad all together? Genius Cary! Real Brilliant.

CARY

You want to protect her and improve her emotional well-being? Then you have to take action. Jim is setting expectations for Reed that he can't keep and it's going to cause issues. Trauma even! No expectations, no disappointments.

MAURA

He'll be here! He'll be here, god dammit, even if it kills him. And if not, god help me, I'll kill him.

CARY

Okay. I'll drop it.

They sit in silence for a moment.

CARY

Are you going to listen to the voicemail now?

With an exhausted sigh she hands over the phone to Cary.

MAURA

You do it.

CARY

Really?

MAURA

Yeah, whatever. I don't even care anymore.

Cary opens the phone, presses a few buttons then hands it back to Maura.

CARY

Done.

MAURA

You just deleted it?

CARY

Yeah. No more stress. No more smoking. No more Jim.

They sit for a moment. Before Maura remembers.

MAURA

Cary... What Reed said she wanted for her birthday was, "More time... with her father". I don't think I can take that away from her. Jim is her father.

CARY

Well, maybe I can be her father now. She'll have her whole life with me. With us.

Cary embraces Maura and they share a look, a smile even. Cary reaches into his pocket to reveal the box but the phone rings.

CARY

Jim again?

MAURA

No. Hold on. Hello? Yes, this is Mrs. Fletcher. ...Oh my god...

Maura is frozen. Listening. She slowly pulls the phone from her ear. She can barely speak.

CARY

What happened?

MAURA

Reed. Get Reed. Jim. Jim was. Accident. Motorcycle...
Train...

CARY

What? Is he okay?

MAURA

No. No. No.

CARY

Okay, you stay here I'll go get Reed.

Cary exits. Maura, barely able to move, sits down at the table. Slowly pulls up her phone and presses a button. We hear, "You have no new messages".

Black out.

End of play.