

It's Only A Bird

By

Trey H. Jordan

hello@trejhjordan.com

EXT. FRONT YARD. MORNING

A gorgeous, blue sky whipped with clouds that float above a modest country side home.

There isn't a soul for miles.

FATHER (35) waters his flowers in a small bed at the front of the house. His sunhat covers his bald head, but there is still enough heat to bring some sweat to his graying stubble.

He takes a quick pause as..

A blood red Cardinal flies in and finds its perch at the top of the pitched roof of the home.

Father gazes at the bird. He smiles.

The bird looks down at Father. Their eyes meet.

Father's reflection rests in the bird's hollow, black eyes.

An uneasiness creeps into Father as gray clouds overtake the clear sky. He stares in horror as the bird lords himself over Father.

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT YARD. MORNING

FATHER'S LIFELESS BODY - Stomach down, head cocked to the side. One eye pressed to the yard below.

The Cardinal is perched on Father's face. It pecks away at his exposed eye.

PUSH IN towards Father's lifeless face. The bird's WHISTLE fills the air.

L CUT/MATCH TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT

Father lies face down on his pillow. His eyes jerk open He GASPS FOR AIR.....*just a nightmare.*

He rolls over in a sweat.

Next to him, **MOTHER** (34) sleeps unbothered.

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He wipes his eyes. Gathers his breath. Sits up.

The moonlight casts a sullen blue over the room.

Father pushes himself out of bed.

INT. DAUGHTER'S ROOM. NIGHT

Father inches the door open into a pink dusted room.

DAUGHTER (6) sleeps soundly. Her long limbs branch across the bed. Her brown hair extends across her sheets like veins under pale white skin.

Father walks in. He sits next to her. Smiles as he moves her hair out of her face.

He takes her hand. Admires them. Then, he spreads her fingers open and places her open hand against his.

She is growing up so fast..

But a small *chirp* pulls his focus to the bedroom window.

He stands to his feet. Steps to the window and pushes the curtains to the side.

The Cardinal is perched on a tree limb silhouetted by the moon beyond.

Father broods as the shadowed bird sits along the branch.

Another *WHISTLE*.

L-CUT TO:

INT. OUTDOORS SHOP. DAY

Down an aisle, another father and daughter pick out fishing poles.

Father watches them with wishful eyes..

GUN CLERK (O.C.)
Makes you feel like a fraud huh?

Father turns his attention towards the..

GUN CLERK (40) a large and disinterested load. He leans against the counter

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FATHER

I'm sorry?

GUN CLERK

Seeing dads like that I mean. I
always wonder where I went wrong..

A beat.

GUN CLERK

So you want to see what's in the
case?

The clerk points at the glass case he is resting on..

But Father looks at the wall of guns behind the clerk.

FATHER

No. I need something simple. Maybe
a .22. It's for a bird.

GUN CLERK

What kind of bird?

FATHER

Um. It's a Cardinal.

The store clerk stiffens.

GUN CLERK

You can't shoot that. It's a
fifteen thousand dollar fine.

FATHER

Okay..I won't shoot it then. I'll
just scare it away.

The store clerk eyes Father with suspicion. *Hmmmm..*

But he relents.

GUN CLERK

Well I do operate on commission.

The clerk turns towards the rack of rifles behind him. He
sets one down in front of Father.

GUN CLERK

Try this one. Basic model.
Something light. Something easy.
Just what the doctor ordered.

Father takes up the rifle and LOOKS DOWN THE SIGHTS.

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CONTINUED: (2)

The clerk sets a box of ammunition on the counter.

GUN CLERK

And these here are yer pills.

Father extends the rifle to the clerk.

The clerk grabs a hold of it. He locks father in place as the two mens hands both clutch the weapon.

GUN CLERK

Look at me.

Father does as he is told.

GUN CLERK

It's bad luck to kill a Cardinal.
That's a spirit come back to
finish its work.

Father swallows nervously.

GUN CLERK

Don't get in the way of that.

A tense stare down..

But the store clerk releases the tension.

GUN CLERK

And besides. It's only a bird.

He chuckles to himself.

GUN CLERK

Now come on. We gotta fill out
your paperwork. Make sure you
ain't some psychopath.

Father forces a laugh and follows the man out of frame as we..

PUSH IN towards the gun rack. An empty space where the .22 was.

INT. FATHER'S CAR. DAY

PULL OUT from the rifle sitting in the back seat.
Rattling up and down from the vibrations as..

Father grips the steering wheel. He turns into the driveway of his home.

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CONTINUED:

He SHIFTS the car into park.

Through the windshield - Daughter runs around in the yard as Mother cheers her on. A Hallmark sight.

He smiles, but then..

The Cardinal. It flies around..playfully..with Daughter and Mother. Daughter laughs. Mother smiles at her joy and claps.

Mother looks towards the car. She smiles. Waves cheerfully at Father. He offers a reticent wave back.

The Cardinal flies up to rest at the top of the roof.

Father looks up at the bird. Their eyes lock once more..

As the vision of the bird - eating away at his face - fills his mind.

INT. DAUGHTER'S ROOM. NIGHT

Father tucks Daughter into her bed. She pulls the covers up tight.

He works through a small routine to get her settled. Kisses. Hugs. Etc.

FATHER

Going to have sweet dreams?

DAUGHTER

Mhmm.

FATHER

Good.

He leans forward. Plants a kiss on her forehead.

He gets up and makes his way towards the door.

DAUGHTER (O.C.)

Daddy?

ON FATHER - as he turns his head towards his daughter in the background.

FATHER

Yeah baby?

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CONTINUED:

DAUGHTER

Nanny says that Cardinals are a sign.

Father maintains his composure. *What are the chances..?*

FATHER

Oh yeah?

Daughter sits up with curiosity.

DAUGHTER

She says that when a Cardinal comes around, it has the spirit of a lost loved one inside.

A contemplative beat.

DAUGHTER

Is that true daddy?

Father considers.

FATHER

No baby. It's only a bird. Now get some sleep.

Father closes the door.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT

Father sits at the edge of the bed. He takes the socks off of his feet as Mother settles in behind him.

MOTHER

I could not believe that bird today..

Father turns towards her.

FATHER

Did you know that..SHE..told HER it was a ghost?

She looks at her Husband. *Come on.*

MOTHER

Relax. It's just an old folk tale.

FATHER

You know what she is doing.

Mother loses patience.

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CONTINUED:

MOTHER

For God's sake. It's only a bird.

She rolls away from father in defeat. Her face contemplative..

Father rolls away from her. He pulls the chord on the bedside lamp.

That sullen blue moon illuminates his face..

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM. LATER THAT NIGHT

Father hasn't slept a wink.

He slowly pushes himself out of bed.

SLIDES HIS HOUSE SHOES ON.

INT. MAIN HALL.

Father moves covertly down the hall and into the..

INT. LIVING ROOM.

He crouches down near an entry way table. Carefully opens a compartment door..

Reaches his hand into the back..

And pulls out a photo..

He studies it. It hurts him. It confuses him.

It shows him a picture of his very pregnant wife with a husband that is not him.

Father knows he should not be doing this.

The house settles. Father quickly places the photo back where he found it.

He takes a deep breath.

INT. DAUGHTER'S ROOM.

The door to the bedroom slowly opens. Father stands in the doorway.

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CONTINUED:

He looks towards his sleeping daughter.

She shifts in her sleep.

Then..

Father moves to the curtains.

He PULLS THE CURTAINS OPEN.

The Cardinal taunts him from the branch.

Father clenches a frustrated jaw.

INT. SHED. MOMENTS LATER

A violent pull of a chord. A shoddy bulb casts a rugged light on Father down below.

The pull chord swings like a pendulum as Father reaches for a top shelf..

He lays down the the rifle on the work table in front of him. He pulls open a drawer..

And places the ammunition next to the gun.

He loads the shells into the rifle.

EXT. FRONT YARD. MIDNIGHT

Father pushes through the front yard with rifle in hand. He steps to the branch. The cardinal looks down at him from above.

Father SETS HIS SIGHTS ON THE CARDINAL..

But the Cardinal speaks..

CARDINAL

(mimicking the store clerk) It's
bad luck to kill a cardinal.

Father COCKS THE LEVER below the trigger and chambers a round.

CARDINAL

(mimicking Mother) It's just an
old folk tale.

Father CHOKES UP ON THE RIFLE.

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CONTINUED:

But the Cardinal tilts its head and speaks..in its own hollow voice.

CARDINAL

My work is not done..

Father swallows his anxiety. His FINGER FLIRTS WITH THE TRIGGER.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Father snaps his head towards the house.

Mother looks at him with fist resting against the window of Daughter's room. She watches in disbelief. *What the hell are you doing?*

Daughter stands in front of mother. She waves with joy.

Father looks towards the branch...

The Cardinal is gone.

He lowers his rifle. Takes a breath. Turns back towards his family.

He forces a smile.

FATHER

Just a raccoon.

INT. OUTDOORS SHOP. NEXT MORNING

Father places the rifle on the counter. He lays the receipt down with it.

Across from him - the Gun Clerk. He looks at him and smiles.

GUN CLERK

You're doing the right thing.

Father nods. *Maybe, maybe not.*

The clerk takes the receipt and returns the cash to him.

EXT. FATHER'S CAR. DAY

Father drives slowly through his small town.

He creeps to a stop to a RED LIGHT.

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CONTINUED:

He throws his head against the headrest in defeat. Then
LOOKS TO HIS LEFT..

A PET STORE.

INT. PET STORE. DAY

A **CASHIER** brings up Father's total.

CASHIER

93.40

Father hands him the cash from his gun return. The
makings of a soft smile form at the ends of his lips.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. LIVING ROOM. THAT NIGHT

FADE IN

Father and Mother sit on the couch. They watch with joy
as..

Daughter dances with excitement in front of them.

DAUGHTER

What is it?! What is it?!

FATHER

Settle down. You have to close
your eyes and hold my hand. Okay?

DAUGHTER

Okay okay!

Father extends his hand.

Daughter takes it.

INT. DAUGHTER'S ROOM. MOMENTS LATER

The door opens. The family stands together in the door
way. Daughter's eyes are covered as Father leads her into
the room.

Something sits in the corner of the room covered by a red
drape.

Father leads Daughter towards the drape.

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CONTINUED:

FATHER

Okay. Open them.

FATHER LIFTS THE DRAPE TO REVEAL..

The Cardinal perched inside a bird cage.

Daughter's mouth drops open in disbelief.

DAUGHTER

You caught him?!

FATHER

Just for you. And only for a
little bit.

Daughter turns to Father. Tears begin to well in her eyes
as she throws herself into him for a tight hug.

A beat.

He pulls Daughter away and thumbs her chin.

FATHER

Come on. Let's go get dinner.

Father escorts Daughter out of her room with Mother close
behind.

Mother and Daughter leave the room..

Father begins to close the door..

But looks across the room at the caged bird.

The Cardinal watches Father with its hollow black eyes.

Father grins. He closes the door.

INT. MAIN HALL.

The bedroom door CLICKS closed.

Father turns around to find Mother eyeing him with
suspicion.

MOTHER

Are you alright?

Father releases his smile.

FATHER

You were right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He looks at her closely. Sets his hands on her shoulders reassuringly.

FATHER

It's only a bird.

CUT TO BLACK..

The Cardinal's WHISTLE rings out.

END