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Kelsey Pretzer

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THE GIRL ON THE PEDESTAL

A Ten-Minute Play

by Kelsey Pretzer

Scene

SETTING: An art museum. TIME: Day.

(The GIRL stands on a pedestal roped off from a group of onlookers. Her arms are at her side, with her palms facing out to the visitors of the art exhibit of which she is a part. Behind and around her are other sculptures and paintings, but the crowd has gravitated to her. She is in a white silk slip, her skin is powdered white as well, and pale. Her wrists are dripping with blood onto her palms and it contrasts with the whiteness of her skin. Her hair falls halfway down her back, messy and uncared for. In front of her, a marble plaque reads: *Love Is Not Romantic*. The ARTIST stands by silently, studying the GIRL. Several people are situated around her. At her right are DIANE and HOWARD, an unhappily married couple. Near HOWARD, behind the GIRL, is MARIE. On the GIRL's left side are professors CECIL and DOMMER.)

DIANE

A little dark, don't you think?

HOWARD

No.

DIANE

What do you mean, *no*, Howie? The girl slit her wrists. That's not dark to you at all?

HOWARD

I guess it's a little exhilarating.

DIANE

Is that how you feel? Like you want to slit your wrists?

HOWARD

I just mean that we're witnessing something that you don't normally get to witness. Certain things are kept quiet. But this is forcing you to look at it.

DIANE

(Annoyed.)

And what is it then, that you see?

HOWARD

That there can be beauty in sadness and desperation. That maybe the struggle in life is something we forget about or refuse to acknowledge because it makes us uncomfortable.

You're uncomfortable right now, aren't you?

DIANE

Of course I am. Isn't this supposed to make us uncomfortable?

HOWARD

(Shrugs.)

Maybe it's romanticizing the ability to take your own life in your hands and just do something!

DIANE

I definitely disagree with that. People do just fine existing without needing to kill themselves to feel alive.

HOWARD

Sure, sure, but maybe it's just about taking the plunge. Maybe it's trying to tell us just to stand for something...

DIANE

You're thinking too much into it, Howie. She's just a sad pathetic depiction of a girl who isn't strong enough to deal with reality. She's selfish to take that way out. Pathetic.

(DIANE walks off, expecting HOWARD to follow her. He does not. Instead, he stands before the GIRL a little longer, and MARIE moves next to him to get a better look.)

MARIE

(To HOWARD.)

What do you think of it all?

(Holds out her hand)

Hi, I'm Marie.

HOWARD

Marie, I'm Howard.

(Looking back to the GIRL.)

There's a lot to think about, I guess.

MARIE

Sure is. I've been staring at this girl for a half an hour now and I'm still not sure I understand. It's so sad... to resort to this. The idea of eternity. It scares me.

HOWARD

But look at how good the artist makes it look. I mean, she's in white, such a pure color. A light color.

MARIE

Are you insinuating there's good in this?

HOWARD

Sure. Isn't there some good in everything. At the bottom, isn't there at the very least something to be learned?

MARIE

It's so hard to justify her suicide as something to learn from, though.

HOWARD

Maybe that's part of what the artist is trying to say. Maybe that there's something to be learned from such a horrible outcome is a testament to the inexplicability of life.

(DIANE reenters, storms to HOWARD and glares.)

DIANE

There is *nothing* to learn from this, Howard, except that maybe I should keep a better eye on my husband! Is this really happening again?

MARIE

Is there a problem?

DIANE

Not if you stay away from my husband. He and I are done here. It was stupid to come, I think. None of this is real, why waste our time on it?

HOWARD

How do you know it's not real?

DIANE

Howard, you're being stupid.

HOWARD

Why? Why is it that every time I think about something... really think about it... you feel threatened?

Are you afraid I'm going to realize I don't need you?

(DIANE starts to retort but is interrupted.)

HOWARD

Because I've figured that out *long* ago. Would it really be so bad to let me feel something? It's only ever business with you, Diane. It's all about the facade. The impressions. The reputation. *That's* pathetic. Not art.

Not something you don't understand because you refuse to try.

(To MARIE.)

I'm sorry you have to witness this. I think we should be going.

MARIE

(Nods, stunned.)

Well... it was nice meeting you.

HOWARD

You as well.

(HOWARD and DIANE exit, leaving MARIE standing. She looks again at the GIRL on the pedestal, whose eyes are locked firmly on some point down the hall of the museum. The GIRL looks tired, but focused. Two older men are standing on the other side of the GIRL. They are professors.)

CECIL

She's dying, or dead. Personally though, I think that the artist wanted us to believe we were watching the process of dying.

DOMMER

Why the means, though? Wouldn't it be more elegant to watch a person die of cancer or old age? Why is it suicide?



CECIL

Perhaps to emphasize the idea that there is no meaning in her life at this point. It's very Beckett. You can die of old age feeling accomplished.

You can die of old age with meaning to your life.

(A pause.)

Look into her eyes. Do you see that?

DOMMER

What?

CECIL

There's determination in them.

DOMMER

(Sarcastic.)

Well, I wonder how long she's been standing there. She's probably tired.

CECIL

No... no, it's not as simple as that. Maybe it's meant to represent the hope and determination to mean something again.

DOMMER

It's a stretch, I think.

CECIL

Hear me out. There was once meaning to her life, and she lost that. Something happened that changed everything. Maybe it was her father being too tough on her, putting too much pressure on her to go to college and make something of her life. Maybe he came into her room at night and touched her... whatever the case, there's darkness now.

She's lost all sense of purpose. Follow me?

DOMMER

Yes, but I can't say I buy it.

CECIL

In life, she has nothing. Maybe she's hoping that her death will mean something again...or that death itself will bring her a new identity and a new purpose. Maybe death is what she hopes will bring that meaning back into her life.

DOMMER

Back into her death, you mean.



CECIL

Yes, her death. Maybe the closest she'll ever come to feeling alive is that last breath she'll take as she realizes eternity awaits her.

MARIE

(Overhears, quietly interrupts.)

Excuse me. I couldn't help overhearing what you were talking about.

CECIL

Yes, of course. What do you think of it?

MARIE

I only wonder if you're thinking too much into it.

CECIL

What, exactly, do you mean?

MARIE

I think you found the revelation because you dug for it.

CECIL

Most enlightenment comes from examination.

MARIE

Yes, sure, but oftentimes I think there's no real enlightenment.

CECIL

I politely disagree.

DOMMER

Let her make her point, Cecil.

MARIE

I'm only wondering if perhaps we've been trained as human beings to look for explanations and meanings where there are none. Isn't that the essence of religion? An answer for things we can't explain? Maybe sometimes it's actually not that complicated. She could just be dying. I mean, it's something we all do. There's no poetry to it, no meaning behind it. It's just the only guarantee in our entire existence.

CECIL

But you don't think that *how* you choose to greet that impending certainty has some sort of meaning to it?

MARIE

Maybe. I don't know. That's the beauty of art, I suppose... and life... no matter how much you think about it, everyone gets something different. What could be a failure to one person could be the most noble solution for another.

DOMMER

You're talking on the girl again, aren't you? You've moved from existential thought back into the showroom, back to that pedestal.

MARIE

We always come back to the same things. Our minds have a gravitational resting point.

CECIL

So you mean to tell me that this girl's suicide is nothing? It has *no* meaning?

MARIE

Maybe to her it does...but we don't know enough of the story for it to mean anything to us.

CECIL

So is most art, then—in your opinion—purposeless?

MARIE

A lot of it is, yes... but the fact that it can stir up some emotion in people even without a purpose is what makes it beautiful.

(LILY and EDSSEL enter. LILY grabs EDSSEL'S arm, pulls him to a stop. Both stare at the GIRL for several seconds without speaking as the rest of the onlookers quietly mutter their thoughts on the piece. By this point, the GIRL'S hands are shaking and each of her breaths take longer to complete. Each time she blinks it takes longer to open her eyes. She looks weary. LILY speaks first.)

LILY

I don't like it.

EDSEL

You don't like much nowadays.

LILY
It's spooky, Ed.

EDSEL
That's why you don't like it? Because it's spooky? That doesn't make you afraid of scary movies, or walking to the liquor store at night.

LILY
I don't know why I don't like it but I don't.
(A pause.)
It's just art, right?

EDSEL
Of course it is.

LILY
She doesn't look too good.

EDSEL
That's probably part of the point. It's just art.

LILY
I don't like it.

EDSEL
The beauty of art, I guess, is that you're free to make your own interpretation, right?

LILY
It's obscene.

EDSEL
A lot of people think what the Greeks painted was obscene, too...
and all those Roman statues with their penises out...

LILY
Showing that stuff is different than suicide. Genitalia is the beauty of the human body. A suicide goes against nature. I don't really like the idea of having to experience self-mutilation. There should be a sign nearby warning us this is here so I could have chosen not to expose myself to it.

EDSEL

Maybe that's part of it...the surprise. And if life imitates art, or whatever that saying is...

LILY

I have enough shit going on in my own life, Ed. Shouldn't the places I go for fun spare me that?

EDSEL

Because the world revolves around you, right?

LILY

I'm not saying it does. I'm just saying...maybe the artist could have given us a break from the darkness of the world.

EDSEL

(Smirking at LILY in amusement.)

Maybe that's why he dressed her in white.

LILY

Stop making fun of me.

EDSEL

I didn't realize this would shake you up so much.

LILY

Of course it will. She's dying in front of us!

EDSEL

Relax. It's just art.

(The GIRL on the pedestal moves suddenly, sits cross legged on the pedestal. Her action is followed by gasps from the crowd. The ARTIST beams, beside himself with glee and happiness as everyone is now forced to look at his work in a new light. The GIRL on the pedestal props her elbows on her knees and rests her head in her bloody palms. She is no longer silent. The crowd watches for about a minute as she struggles to breathe. Blood is dripping down her forearms, onto her knees, her feet, the pedestal.)

CECIL

It's so simplistic...but the depth of the message is sophisticated.

DOMMER
Beautifully tragic.

MARIE
You can almost feel it in your own chest.

LILY
I don't like it.

EDSEL
Now it's art in motion, right?
(To ARTIST.)
Right?

ARTIST
Have you all been so busy overthinking that you disregarded the sign?
Loving too much, and in the wrong way, is a vice. You trust people and
they hurt you. You give them everything and they maim your soul. And when
it's over? You can never again be who you were before you loved.
You're an imitation of the person you once were. And you end up alone.
We all die alone.

(The GIRL on the pedestal looks up when she hears his voice. Her face
is smudged with the blood from her hands. The look in her eyes,
the determination she once had to stay standing, to stay still, is gone.
There is nothing there now. The GIRL on the pedestal is a hollow shell,
an imitation of the person she had once been. The struggle to breathe
now is almost too much. She is slipping away.)

ARTIST
(To the GIRL on the pedestal.)
You handed me your life and let me snuff it out.

(The GIRL on the pedestal wavers, trying to stay sitting upright, but
no longer has the strength to do so. She topples off the side of the pedestal,
falls the two feet into a crumpled heap on the floor. DOMMER and EDSEL
jump over the rope to get to her. DOMMER pulls her into his arms and
checks for a pulse. EDSEL calls 911 as LILY, MARIE, and CECIL stand there
in shock. The GIRL'S dress is ripped and dirtied. Her powdered skin
is disrupted, and now she is impure. DOMMER checks for a pulse and
finds none. He stands with her in his arms and looks at the rest of
the onlookers in shock.)

DOMMER
(To ARTIST in disbelief.)
You fucking killed her.

ARTIST
We all did. You talked her existence down to a triviality.
You're as much at fault if I am. Perhaps more.

LILY
(Horrified.)
So she's really dead?

ARTIST
Most certainly.

LILY
How do you know?

ARTIST
Isn't it obvious?
(A reflective pause, in which the entire cast remains silent.)
We've run out of things to say.

