

Pods

By Kym Fraher

Set in current times, on the coast of Seattle, a man and a woman meet to finalize details of their divorce. In the back drop, a whale pod mourns the loss of one of their own.

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CHARACTERS

Glenn--male, middle-aged, fiercely insecure but covers it with the trappings of success, borderline narcissistic

Barbara--female, middle-aged, disillusioned, expected her life to be better than it turned out to be, used to nice things but prepared for a life downgrade

SETTING

Along a shoreline in Seattle

Summer 2018

PODS

GLENN, dressed in expensive summer clothes, stands using binoculars to look out across the water. BARBARA, approaches him with 2 coffees. She is dressed less nicely than he is. *GLENN's dialogue when speaking about the whales should be read with energy and excitement but notably less enthusiastic when he speaks directly with BARBARA.

BARBARA

Hi Glenn, good morning. How are you doing? Is work going okay?

No response from GLENN, who continues to look out at the whales.

BARBARA

You look good. Healthy. Are you training for the marathon again this year? It's supposed to be good weather for it: Fingers crossed for no rain.

GLENN

(in acknowledgment)

You wanted to meet.

BARBARA

Wow, the view here is spectacular. (Peers past the edge of the cliff) Yikes, long way down. You're not planning to push me off, are you?

She laughs nervously. No response from GLENN.

Um, are they still out there, the whales I mean?

GLENN

Yes, I think so. Although I haven't seen any signs of them for 30 minutes or so. They were all around here yesterday, all day.

BARBARA

You were out here yesterday too?

GLENN

Yes.

BARBARA

Wait, yesterday was Tuesday, didn't you have work?

GLENN

I'm making time for this. Seeing a pod of whales grieving like this might be a once-in-a-lifetime thing.

BARBARA

Yea...so anyway, Glenn, I wanted to talk to you.

GLENN

You just did.

BARBARA

I mean about Jarod. I was speaking to my new lawyer and she said/

GLENN

/I read in the paper that the whole pod is now helping the mom push her dead calf's body along.

BARBARA

Oh. After I've come all the way out here to talk to you, I think the least you can do is listen to what I have to say without distractions.

GLENN

Apparently, it's some sort of grieving ritual.

BARBARA

(unsure, trying to be sweet, innocuous)

Like I was saying, my lawyer said that you need to turn over those papers, or you'll be in contempt of court. I don't want to go there--I'd like for things to remain cordial between us. I'm sure you want to avoid our issues impacting the kids too.

GLENN grunts in response.

The reason I wanted to meet is that Jared's doctor said the window is closing for that treatment I emailed you about. If we don't act now, we'll have to consider more drastic interventions. Luckily the surgery is covered. But since it's your company's insurance, you have to sign for it. Those are the papers I sent to you last week. Did you get them?

GLENN turns towards her briefly and then back to his binoculars and the whales.

GLENN

I got them.

BARBARA

Great, so can I count on having those papers signed this week?

GLENN

(ignoring her)

Apparently, the calf was only a few hours old when it died. There are only about 75 of this particular kind of killer whale left in the world.

BARBARA

(trying a different tactic but still trying to remain friendly)

Are you paying attention to me at all? I'm just trying to keep you in the loop here. I thought you'd like to know that Emma is leaving for her job next week.

This gets his attention. He puts down the binoculars.

GLENN

She has a new job? Where?

BARBARA

Oh, I heard me that time? Austin. Texas. I told her that I didn't want her to go so far away, but it seems like a good opportunity for her, and she insisted, so you know, what can you do? Remember how hot it was that time we flew to El Paso for that weekend trip before we were married? It'll be nice for her there I think. She's such a summer girl. She'll love it, I think.

GLENN

Is she going to stop by to say goodbye to me before she goes?

BARBARA

(does not want to breach this topic)

I don't know. You know how she feels. I'm not going to push her--We should let her sort through it all in her own time.

GLENN

That's something you could make happen. That's something you could do for me.

BARBARA

What? Talk her into doing something she doesn't want to do?

GLENN

Tell her to come see her dad before she leaves.

GLENN resumes his watch of the whales. There is a brief uncomfortable silence.

BARBARA

I'm not getting involved in that--she doesn't do what I ask her to most of the time, and certainly not about that. Listen Glenn, this is important--I really need you to sign those papers. That's why I was willing to come way out here on a Wednesday morning. I wouldn't be here, bothering you if it didn't matter. I called the insurance company and they made it clear that you, as the principal holder of the policy have to/

GLENN

I'll get them to you soon.

BARBARA

(more exasperated)

You've been saying "soon" for 5 weeks now. If Jarod's sinus infection gets any worse, it could create serious damage to his nasal cavity. I don't want to escalate this issue, but I will if I have to.

GLENN

If you do, you won't get your papers any sooner, I'll tell you that. (Attention back to water) Oh, look! I think I just saw one come up for air...yes! There's another one. They're still out there!

BARBARA

I saw you and, uh, what's her name again?

GLENN

Who?

BARBARA

Your new girlfriend. Bambi?

GLENN

Amber.

BARBARA

Yes, that's it--I saw you and Amber last Thursday. You were both emerging from that sweet new BMW you just got.

GLENN flinches.

BARBARA

Yea, I know about your new gift to yourself. What did that set you back--80, 90 grand?

GLENN

That's none of your business.

BARBARA

It actually is my business, Glenn, when the kids and I are setting budgets and struggling to buy new tires for our 2007 Subaru, while you and jailbait are riding in high style, on your way to Canlis. (More conciliatory) I get it, I understand that you want to make things hard for me. Whatever. I expected that. But this isn't about me, this is about Jared, your son. You should be trying to make his life easier, not harder. He's in real pain. He missed 2 weeks of school because of the sinus headaches.

GLENN

Don't tell me what I should be doing. You're his mother. You wanted primary custody. So here you go---you figure it out. (Back to whales) You know, it's rare for a mother whale to support a dead baby until it falls apart but that's what she's doing out there. Isn't that wild? Nature is so amazing.

BARBARA

(ignoring his whale statement)

Glenn! I need your full attention about this. I don't care about those whales out there. I care about our family.

GLENN

I'll tell you what, Barbara, how about if Emma comes to say goodbye to me before she leaves for Texas, stays, say 10, 15 minutes, then I'll give her the insurance papers, signed. You'll get what you want, and I'll get what I want.

BARBARA

I'm willing to work with you, Glenn, compromise, whatever, but frankly, using Jared's health to blackmail Emma into giving you the time of day isn't the way to her heart. Seriously, what makes you think that she'd agree to see you when you act like that?

GLENN

(shrugs)

She loves her brother, so she'll do what she has to do to help him.

BARBARA

So you don't care for Jared then?

GLENN

I do, in my own way. (Beat--he points toward the water) They won't know for sure how long the pod will mourn the dead calf. They have to stop eventually or they'll all starve. The salmon population has really declined and that's all they eat. (Almost to himself) I wonder why they don't just go eat something else.

BARBARA

I don't know what you want from me. When we were married, I tried my damndest: I paid all the bills, made sure your button-down shirts were picked up from the cleaner's, cleaned the house without asking you to do any of it. I gave you 2 beautiful, kind, smart children. Why are you treating your family like this?

GLENN

You ended my marriage.

BARBARA

Technically, yes. I ended our marriage. You didn't have to think about anyone other than yourself all day long, did whatever you wanted, when you wanted, not matter what the rest of us had going on. Why the hell would you end that gravy train? After the fifth time you refused to go to counseling about your drinking, I was done. I couldn't take it anymore.

GLENN

You took everything away from me. You kicked me out and filed for divorce. My work is stressful--I deserve the chance to unwind. One day, it was okay that I went out with my buddies after work, and then the next day it wasn't.

BARBARA

(cannot hold back her frustrations now)

Ahh, no, uh--It was never *okay*. I tolerated it, but it wasn't ever *okay*. I tried to talk to you about it over and over again, but you wouldn't listen. THAT apparently hasn't changed. You were the "victim" then, and you're still happy to play the "victim" now. God! The only thing I'm unsure about is why I didn't kick you out sooner.

GLENN

(coolly)

That is not the way to get those papers from me.

BARBARA

What is the way, Glenn?

GLENN

I told you.

BARBARA

Making Emma trade a little piece of herself for something you 're supposed to turn over anyway so you could feel like a powerful man again? Risking your son's health to get what you want? God, how pathetic you are! You'd rather damage your son and lose your daughter forever than give a little and cooperate like an adult.

GLENN

(this is not how he was hoping this would go)

I'd rather you feel a little consequence for taking my life away.

BARBARA

Your new life doesn't seem to bad--You've got a new car, a new condo, a new girlfriend. How old is she? Twenty-five? Your family was holding you back anyway. Or maybe not, since you had all those girlfriends even when we were together. So what's missing, exactly? Now I'm not around to nag at you, you don't have to do things for the kids-- How were things so much better when we were married? Huh? I'd really like to know.

Lowers his binoculars and turns to face her.

GLENN

People used to look up to me: I had a family, a nice enough house, a good job. I was respected in the community. Now, I'm just another middle-aged divorcee, dating a girl who could've been my daughter's classmate. No one looks at me like they did before.

BARBARA

(sarcastic)

Oh, the glamor is gone. There was nothing real about your image before--You had a family, but it didn't mean anything to you. Not really.

GLENN

The house looked great.

BARBARA

The house looked good from the outside but needed a new roof, new kitchen, so many repairs. It was all a farce. It wasn't real. Just like our marriage wasn't real.

GLENN

(uncomfortably)

You were real.

BARBARA
(she did not expect this)

What about me, Glenn?

GLENN
When we first were dating, you were so happy, Barb. You were so....vivacious. It was fun to be around you--you were not just the life of the party, you *were* the party. I thought, if this woman loves me and wants to be around me, then maybe I am somebody, somebody special.

BARBARA
(softer)

Glenn, I/

GLENN
(bitter)
/But then you didn't anymore. We got married, and once the kids came, it was bye-bye Glenn. You only had time for them, and I was the guy who brought home the paycheck. We didn't go out, because you were too tired. You weren't interested in doing special things for me anymore.

BARBARA
I would've loved to have done things with you more often, but you were so rarely home. You missed Jarod's award ceremony for swim team, and it broke his heart. I had to deal with that fall-out. When Emma was pinned for Honor's Society, you should have seen the look on her face, searching for you to walk through the auditorium doors, but you didn't show up.

GLENN
I'm surprised they even noticed.

BARBARA
What? Of course, they noticed. Why the hell do you think Emma refuses to have anything to do with you?

GLENN
(all pretense of calm is gone)
Because she's a bitch, like her mom. Because you poisoned my kids against me.

BARBARA
Oh please. You've done a bang-up job of that by yourself. Emma's a smart girl. You hurt her over and over again. More than any of us, she wanted to believe in you--she really did. But after a while, she began to form calluses where that love used to be...She's the one who found the condoms in your car.

GLENN

She found what?

BARBARA

The condoms Glenn. She checked several times to see if they were still there and lo and behold, they were fewer each time.

GLENN

You encouraged her to go snooping around in my car?

BARBARA

No, Glenn. She was looking for the umbrella that you keep in your car because we were going shopping on a rainy day and mine was broken. She went looking for the umbrella and found the condoms instead. I told her to leave it alone. I knew nothing good would come of it by looking again, but she did it anyway.

GLENN

She did not have permission to go snooping around.

BARBARA

And you did not have permission to go fucking around, so I guess we can call it even.

GLENN turns back to the whales, sighs, and raises the binoculars to his face again.

BARBARA

(desperate for a compromise)

I know, why don't I send Jared by and you can visit with him and give him the signed papers?

GLENN

No.

BARBARA

Why not?

GLENN

I can see Jared anytime. All I have to do is call, and he comes running. No, I'll only give the papers to Emma.

BARBARA

But why Emma? Why do you want a relationship with her and not to Jared?

GLENN

I told you--Jared is too easy. Emma's always been more ambitious. She doesn't need me. Not in the way that Jared does. I want to share in her successes. I need to be a part of that again.

BARBARA

So, everything has to be to your exact specifications. You insist that I meet you here to talk about the forms for your son's health, on a cliff so you can watch whales and only half listen to me. I'd rather meet in a lawyer's office but fine, whatever, I do what you want. I was willing to cooperate, to be civil. But apparently the trick is to refuse to give you what you want. Is that how to make you want something Glenn, by withholding it?

GLENN

What I want is a relationship with my daughter. Why is that so much to ask? Oh look! I think that...yes--It's the mother whale, and she's breaching--is that, it looks like she has the calf's body! (Reverently) Oh my god, that's so magnificent.

BARBARA shoves him to get his attention.

GLENN stumbles toward the edge of the cliff but does not fall.

GLENN

Hey! Watch what you're doing! You could have killed me!

BARBARA

There's a reason why you can't have a relationship with OUR daughter. God! You know, I care about nature and whales and shit too, but not more than my own kids. Whatever I once saw in you is as dead and rotten as that poor calf carcass out there. Thanks for delivering the kind of push I needed!

GLENN

To do what, exactly?

BARBARA

My lawyer wanted to come at you hard, but I was holding her back, for the sake of the kids, but I'm done with that now. You love sea life so much? Wait until you meet my shark.

BARBARA storms off. GLENN watches her go for a moment, then turns back to watching the whales.

END OF PIECE