

The Animal

Fiction
Word Count 1352

The Animal

“A good woman should never be alone.” He handed her the cage.

“You couldn’t stay with me? The storms, I worry about you so.”

He hugged her in his proper and public way. “They’re building us a canal by Egypt.”

“Just for the Tea Company?”

“No, no. Military thing as usual.” He stepped back. His uniform was stained. “Hold it out over the sand, dear. Yes. Good. Like that.”

“Oh. We’ve never had a pet. Sorry. What does it eat?”

“My crew told me it ate anything. In fact...”

“Yes?”

“Nothing, really. I do have to go. They’re wanting to cast off. Have to see to it.”

Gently, she put the cage on the dock. She held his hands. "How long?"

"Only three months this time. Won't have to go all the way around the damn Cape anymore. Maybe we could start that family..."

"Hey Captain, wish my wife'd kiss me like that."

The ship sailed. The women drank sherry together. They pretended it was a tiny bit to ease the parting. She left the church and got on home.

"This house!" She yelled. "It's so big! And I'm so...so...little!"

She looked at the cage. "I don't always talk to myself like this. It's just when he goes I feel as if..."

There was a sound from the cage.

"Yes! That way. Yes!" she said. "At last somebody understands..." Someone else knew what it was like, felt the same way, wanted the same things. Someone she could confide in, share dark fantasies with. *Some-one?* No, *some-thing*. *Some-Thing*. She opened the cage. "Why, look at you! You're too little to know how I feel. You'd have to be a person, anyway."

They looked at each other.

"Here, c'mon out. I want to hold you." She lay back on the floor. "Now, you've

already met my husband, John. My name is Annette. Oh, so you like my hair?

Then I'll let it down for you. There. And you, you're so soft."

She had to get up to light the lamps. "I wish you could do this. I hate the smell of kerosene. But you probably do worse than I." What am I doing? she thought. I'm talking like I expect him to answer me.

She added some wood to the stove. "Potatoes and onions? That's what I'm going to have. Fish? No, I think not. You don't look like a fish person, either."

Annette put out some elegant china that her husband had brought her from the east.

"I have some old silver from my family. Irish. Engraved and all. But you wouldn't..."

It sat with its paws clasped together.

"Here, you sit on the table. Like so. Good. Now, I leave the skins on the potatoes. It's supposed to be good for you. Salt on your onions?"

Annette said Grace. When she looked up the animal had just raised his head.

They started to eat. She heard silverware cutting food.

"Oh, wait." She went to the dining room. She returned with a candelabra.

"John and I never use this. I'll have to find the candles. Perhaps ..."

Four white candles were lying on the kitchen table.

Annette stood still. She laughed quietly. "Why, thank you."

Candlelight dinners are always romantic. This was no exception. They went back into the living room.

"Usually there's something left, but you seem to be very hungry. You're even bigger. I think." She looked at the cage. "You wouldn't fit in there anymore. Well, we can work out sleeping arrangements later."

She leaned back against the couch. "This is going to be your home as well as ours, so I think I ought to tell you something about it. John built it for me when we first got married. He said I could have it any way I wanted because sea captains were rich. Well, I had them..." She went on for twenty minutes.

"Anyway, I'll bet you'd have a lot to tell me about your life if...if you could talk."

"I..."

"*What!* I mean, what did..."

"want..."

Annette held her hand to her mouth.

"yuh...yuh..."

“Words? Aren’t you supposed to growl or bark or something? Don’t you shake your head like that! You shouldn’t look at me that way, either. You’re making me all funny inside. Oh, dear. Oh, my.”

There was the sound of whispering.

They were together all the time. When Annette went for groceries, people would say, “She’s got that thing with her.” People stepped aside when she no longer carried it. They closed their doors when it no longer wore a leash. Indeed, it cast a sizeable shadow. They would go to the tiny library and get books. Lots of them.

“Misses Carlyle, all them books, me and the boys ’ll give you a hand. ”

“Thank you, no. We’ve got it fine.”

They were at the hardware store one day getting gardening and carpentry tools. A sailor came in. “My God, it’s a rarry. Never seen one that big, though.”

“Rarry? He is?” said Annette. “ All these months and not even *he* knew.”

The sailor and the clerk looked at each other then at the animal. “ Bet you asked him, right?”

“Yes.” she smiled.

A month or so later they had stopped in at the pub. Unusual for lady, but it

was a hot afternoon. When they left there was a conversation at the bar." They come right in here, see, the two of them. They sit down. She asks for a

lemonade. I take it over to her. Then *it* stands up, walks over to the bar and says, 'Could I have a pint, please?' "

"You mean..."

"Yeah."

The canal had not been completed, so John was still in the Indian Ocean.

Annette put on a show of despair. The rarry had quickly mastered the English language. It was working on French. Telescopes were common in their town, so lens adaptations opened the celestial world for them. Blacksmithing, furniture making, rebuilding their house, even DaVinci's machinery came easily to him. All those books. Their garden took up the farm next to them. As the rarry grew he ate more. And more. This meant that carpentry became a primary consideration. Heavier flooring, oak and steel trusses, enlarged doorways.

Their personal lives were scandalous. The moans of passion, the whips. The goose down feathers stuck to the steamy bedroom windows. It was even said

that when concerned neighbors stopped by, she answered the door naked and covered with its hair, a wild look in her eyes. A perverse love nest, a disgrace.

Thank God no one would believe it.

John's ship returned. There was great celebration. But there was the secret.

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The townspeople considered the unexplainable events. They must protect their honorable sea captain. Gossip was discouraged.

John was astounded by the rarry's size, amazed by its ability to speak. The telescopes, the giant garden, the architecture. Incredible. But his wife was different. Quite a bit different. It did not take long for John to understand. From that cage had come a satanic monster and it had done this. His darling wasn't injured but - and there was no other way to say it - she was in love with an animal! John told people that it was he who had driven her to the brink of madness; that it was his fault. He would leave the sea and be at her side forever.

A town meeting was held. Everybody knew what had to be done, even Annette. She and the rarry had talked for some time. They even laughed. The drovers had two teams of oxen and a reinforced cart. It was an exhausting journey, but they finally got to the cliffs that overhung the sea. It was then that the rarry started to sing: *"It's a long way to Tip-a-rarry..."*

John had his house repaired. They seemed to be living an ordinary life. Every

few nights Annette would take a walk on the beach. "Time alone." she would say. Returning, she might be putting her hair up. With a wild look in her eyes.

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