

Mom's Boyfriend Returns in Form of Peacock

No one really gets how special I am. If it's the same for other peacocks, I wouldn't know. I am the only one of my kind at the zoo. Like right now I am roaming the grounds, fanning my beautiful plumage and doing a little dance at the guests. I make it look easy. But it isn't easy. In a way, it's a burden. A tall woman with a small boy approaches me. I can't believe my little bird eyes. It's Crystal, my fiance, and her stupid son Kayden.

"So beautiful," she says. And just like before, she draws me in. She's all white and brown, no good colors at all. Except for her eye shadow. Her eye shadow is blue and green and shimmery. I used to think it was tacky, but now I get excited. For a moment I wish I had a human penis again.

I shiver my train and make a slight turn. The sun hits me just right, just for Crystal, my beautiful iridescent feathers for her eyes only. "I love him!" she says and smiles big. I hope she takes me home, so we can go back to rewatching *The Wire* together and plan our wedding. But of course that's impossible. Still, I have her undivided attention, which is all I ever really wanted.

Kayden tugs at Crystal “I want to see the elephants!” he shouts and jumps while stuffing Cheetos in his mouth, making a rude spectacle of himself as usual. Crystal talks to him in her submissive mom voice and she isn’t looking at me. It is unbearable. I can’t help myself, I let out my mating call. You can hear it all the way at the other end of the zoo. I let out three more.

“Ouch! That’s loud!” Crystal says and covers her ears. She has that look on her face I hate. The stubborn look.

“Mom, this bird is too loud and I want to see the elephants,” Kayden says. Just like before, I feel powerless and mean. They start walking away and my bird heart beats fast and sick. One of the peahens approaches me, dips her head. I put down my feathers and turn away from her. If this was a week ago, I would’ve shown her a good time, out behind the zebra exhibit. I would do it right out in the open in front of all the kids and their parents just to rub their noses in it, if it was up to me, but this peahen is shy. And right now she looks like a big ugly turkey to me. I follow Crystal.

“Mom, the ugly bird is following us.” I can’t believe my ears. Ugly? Who does this guy think he is?

Crystal turns around. “Aw, maybe he’s hungry. I wonder what they eat?” I can’t believe she doesn’t know me better by now. Why can’t she see my love? Why doesn’t she accept it? I have so much to offer, even now. I hold my head high and get ready to fan my train again for the big show that will win her over. But before I am able to, Kayden throws a Cheeto on the ground. To my horror and disbelief, I eat it.

They both start laughing maniacally. They used to do this all the time. Kayden would do something stupid and they would both cackle and look at each other, and I wasn’t in on the joke. Sometimes I was even the butt of it, like right now. “Oh just lighten up, he’s seven years old,”

Crystal would say. Then Kayden would cry and of course she would hold him in her lap like he was a little baby and stroke his hair and say some shit about me while she put him to bed, and I would have to go into the den and jerk off alone.

Kayden shakes out the entire bag of Cheetos. Frantically I seek out every Cheeto, swallowing it whole. I can't help myself. Something in my peacock brain compels me to eat these special neon orange slugs. They taste weird and dry, and vaguely I worry the nutritional makeup will compromise my appearance, dull my colors. Kayden is still laughing and so is Crystal even though she is saying "Ok, enough, enough, let's go." This is a whole new level for her as far as indulging Kayden goes. Encouraging animal abuse! I let out a distressed call, which sounds not unlike a sad meow. Crystal's face softens and I think I've got her. But of course I don't. I'm a peacock now. All I can do is impress her for a moment with my beauty and sadness.

And I never had her then, either. Not really. Even the night I proposed. Everything was almost perfect. We finished dinner at Sizzler. We walked along the waterfront, looking at the moon in every ripple. It was like we were the only two people in the world, and all those homeless people lying in the grass and the cyclists racing by were just abstract figures in the background of a painting about us. I kneeled down and watched her face. I took out the ring, an 18 karat white gold halo diamond ring with a 6 millimeter round emerald at the center that took me nine months working as a security guard at Target to save up for. She said yes, and was happy, but something was on her mind. It could only be one thing. Despite everything I did for her and Kayden, she never believed me when I said that I loved him like a son.

Three months into our engagement she was driving me to the unemployment office. I asked her where her ring was. She started crying. I asked if the marriage was off, what did she do with the ring. "No, no," She said, "I want to marry you." I was quiet. "I lost the ring," She said.

But I knew what really happened. She took it off to go for a swim, left it on her nightstand as usual. He was always going through her stuff, pilfering things, hiding things for a laugh. I don't know know, but I know.

They're walking towards the elephants, holding hands, and I'm following behind with my head down, looking for what? More Cheetos? I feel disgusted with myself. I walk and peck at some stale popcorn, an injured beetle. Kayden is rambling about school. The teachers he doesn't like, the kids that are mean to him. His shoelaces trail and bounce behind him. I walk closer behind Crystal, hoping she turns and looks down before he falls. I never noticed how skinny he was before, how pale, and his thick glasses aren't doing him any favors either. I used to tell Crystal that if she got him contacts kids wouldn't bully him so much. Then she'd get annoyed and tell me to mind my business and get a job.

I had been fired for doing my job too well. Target's loss prevention department doesn't mess around. I thought tackling that woman walking out with unpaid-for BluRays would get me a promotion, or at least Employee Of The Week, but I was very wrong. I didn't pay attention much during orientation, otherwise I would have known that you are not supposed to restrain or assault the shoplifters. Sure, I probably could have reasoned that out. But I've always been the kind of guy that does what feels right in the moment. And I still think, in a way, it was right, and Crystal should have supported me in this. Not everyone could do what I did.

I didn't laze about. I made everyone dinner, I picked up, I watched Kayden when Crystal had to work late. One night when she was still gone I looked for my wallet. Kayden was in his room singing to himself at his little desk. "Kayden? Where's my wallet?" I yelled. "I don't know," he said. I looked everywhere. In the couch cushions, in the pockets of the coats hanging in the entryway, underneath the bed. I could pretend to give him the benefit of the doubt for only

so long. I went into his room and grabbed his backpack off the floor. I turned it upside down and dumped everything out. There, layered between drawings of elephants and math worksheets, was my wallet. I kneeled down, “Ah, hah!” I yelled, and extended my arm and turned my body to brandish the thing in his stupid face. I had caught him red handed, she would have to do something. A vivid fantasy I often entertained flashed through my mind. Kayden sent to boarding school, Kayden sent to his grandparents’, Kayden sent far far away. And just then my hand, clutching the wallet, struck him in the face and he fell backwards. He was standing right behind me and I didn’t know. I’ll always remember that look on his face right before he started crying. So weak and afraid. Nothing I said could make it better. He ran and covered and cried. Crystal came through the door and he ran to her. “He hit me!” he yelled. But I didn’t, not on purpose. I explained to her what happened but she looked stubborn and suspicious and said nothing to me. She stroked his head on the couch. I left. I drove and drove, wondering what I could do to make it up to her. I didn’t have these feathers that I have now, this godlike beauty that hypnotizes women into submission. I decided to buy the most expensive bouquet of flowers I could find, on credit of course. The florist was closing soon, I had to move fast. I ran a red light. I saw the truck coming just out of the corner of my eye. And then everything was black. And now I'm a peacock living in a zoo.

He was a little thief, a secret bully. It would go on and on and I would be the one to suffer for it. She would never punish him. I didn’t hate Kayden. I liked him sometimes. He was a child, he could be endearing. Like now as he walks with Crystal, his little hand in hers, happier than I’ve ever been.

Kayden stumbles a little and I quicken my little dinosaur stride. Crystal is oblivious, pointing at an orange ape and talking about evolution. I move too recklessly, I step on Kayden’s

lace, he almost falls but rights himself. Then he turns and yells “Get away dumb bird!” and I can’t help myself. I move to the side of him and he puts his hand out like he knows what’s coming before I even do. His little finger looks like a white worm. I bite down hard. Crystal screams, Kayden screams. I let go, in shock, and move backwards in a wavy pattern and let out my distressed call. One of the workers is already coming for me and I know this is the end of something again. I will be behind bars for the rest of my peacock life. My days of roaming are over and I will never see Crystal or Kayden again. Crystal is consoling Kayden with that look on her face, that look of total unconditional love. It was never like that for me. I always had to earn it. And even then it wasn’t the same. Oh Crystal, I didn’t mean to hurt Kayden. I am sorry. I just want this nightmare to end.