

Hunter Gatherers

By Peter Sinn Nachtrieb

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CHARACTERS

Pam – 35 – Our hero.

Wendy – 35 – Pam's best friend.

Richard – 35 – Pam's Husband.

Tom – 35 – Wendy's Husband. Smaller than Richard

SETTING

Pam and Richard's urban apartment in a city much like San Francisco. Perhaps it's a converted factory into condo lofts, or perhaps condo lofts made to look like they were from a converted factory. Clean. Modern. High ceilings. Chrome? Appeals to the eye but there's not a lot of warmth. Furniture looks nice, but is uncomfortable. Cataloguey? West Elmy? Maybe. There is a "Great Room" where most of the action takes place. Lots of space. The walls are decorated with tribal artifacts: Masks, spears, skulls on a string. The weapons and artifacts look clean, well mounted, completely disassociated from any sort of use. Metal sculptures are dotted about. Photos of a wedding, Pam and Richard stand coupled next to Wendy and Tom. There is also a bathroom, a bedroom (maybe upstairs?) a door to the apartment, and an entrance to a kitchen.

TIME

2005. May. Evening.

MUSIC

Of the late 80s. Synth Pop. Crisp. Grainless?

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Act 1, Scene 1

(PAM and RICHARD's apartment. The Great Room. Afternoon.

A large cardboard box sits on the floor. Newspaper is laid out around it. *The Joy of Cooking* is sitting next to the box, open to a page.

PAM stands in front of the door, weighed down by too many plastic grocery bags filled with shrink-wrapped vegetables, grains, nuts, berries, and other packaged groceries, plus a large assortment of fresh flowers arranged in a tasteful urban design (i.e. lots of dead twigs mixed in).

RICHARD is leaning over the box. In one hand, he holds a very sharp, large knife.

RICHARD reaches into the box, attempting to take hold of the creature inside. We hear a loud "baaaaah," more vigorous shuffling. RICHARD tries to take a firm grasp. He does not succeed, pulls his arms out, and sits back, frustrated.

A pause)

PAM
Was the butcher closed?

RICHARD
No.

(pause)

PAM
So you tried the butcher first?

RICHARD
Uh-huh.

(pause)

PAM

They were out of lamb?

RICHARD

It didn't look fresh.

PAM

Oh.

(pause)

PAM

How fresh does it need to be?

RICHARD

Super.

PAM

That's a good butcher. I'm sure that they only carry-

RICHARD

(quoting)

"As though the blood has just stopped. Caught in the muscles. Swishing. Unsure. 'Where do I go now,' it wonders?"

PAM

That's very elaborate.

RICHARD

That's the *Joy of Cooking*.

PAM

A new edition?

RICHARD

This chapter is written with a greater passion than the others.

(pause)

PAM

I'm going to unpack these.

(PAM heads for the kitchen. RICHARD makes another attempt to hold the lamb still. PAM has almost exited when-)

RICHARD
You're going to have to help me.

PAM
I should really get these peppers in the sub-zero.

RICHARD
Young Carl here has got some feist in him.

PAM
Who?

RICHARD
Lots of spunk and vigor.

PAM
You named it?

RICHARD
You name what you love.

PAM
Carl?

RICHARD
This is a very intimate thing I'm about to do, Skipper.

PAM
I don't understand what you want me to-

RICHARD
(picking up *The Joy of Cooking*)
"The 'holder' calms the lamb, much like a mother calms her babe. A soft caress, a scratch on the nose, stories of magic and happiness softly cooed into the ear steady the throat and relax the soul to help assure a clean cut."

(The box jolts violently)

PAM
I don't think I can do that.

RICHARD
You just need two hands.

PAM

It's more of an emotional thing, Richard.

RICHARD

I'm feeling it too. There are great big emotions.
Swirling all around us.

PAM

I'm sorry Richard. I can't. I'll get started on the
brownies.

(PAM heads for the kitchen)

RICHARD

You love lamb.

(PAM stops)

PAM

Yes.

RICHARD

You love the taste of lamb?

PAM

It's my favorite savory flavor, yes, but—

RICHARD

Pamela Christian Gable, this will be the best lamb you have
ever tasted.

PAM

I don't doubt that.

RICHARD

It feels like you're doubting, Pam.

PAM

I never doubt.

RICHARD

You're doubting this meal. Yourself. Us?

PAM

Of course not.

RICHARD

I was hoping this was something we could do together.

PAM
Oh.

RICHARD
A Pam and Richard collaboration.

PAM
Mmmm.

RICHARD
For tonight, when "Fab Four" gathers again.

PAM
It's the most special night of the year.

RICHARD
Things must be done to keep love and good fortune shining upon us.

PAM
Sacrifice?

RICHARD
It's not going to be easy. The best things never are. But here we are, together, you, and me, and Carl, and we have an opportunity to create something.

PAM
Something important.

RICHARD
Something really delicious.

PAM
A tribute.

RICHARD
A gift.

(beat)

PAM
I do love to give.

RICHARD
One smell of it, Pam, roasting in the oven...

PAM
This is a symbol. Of friendship.

RICHARD
One chunk, steaming on your fork-

PAM
Of faith and togetherness-

RICHARD
-Juicy, moist, hello there, chunk.

PAM
An act of love.

RICHARD
And when that meat hits your tongue-

PAM
Here it is.

RICHARD
Shooting across your buds-

PAM
Here's your symbol right in front of you.

RICHARD
Filling you up with juice.

PAM
And it's young...

RICHARD
With life. La Vida!

PAM
And it's scared...

RICHARD
La vida del carne!

PAM
And it's about to end.

RICHARD
PAM!

(she snaps out of it)

PAM

Yes.

RICHARD

You just need to hold him.

(pause)

PAM

All right.

RICHARD

I'll do the rest.

(PAM sets the groceries down. She reaches in the box. We hear skittering. PAM uses a little more force to hold it still. RICHARD takes the knife)

PAM

Oh goodness.

RICHARD

You're doing great.

PAM

It's breathing heavy.

RICHARD

Pet him.

PAM

What?

RICHARD

He needs to be relaxed. Scratch the nose. Tell stories of magic.

(PAM pets the lamb. RICHARD gets in a good knife-wielding position)

PAM

(looking away, quietly)

Wizards. Enchanted castles.

(a silent, tense moment, where it feels
Richard could cut at any moment)

I love you. RICHARD

I love you too. PAM

You're my Skipper. RICHARD

And you're my Boat. PAM

(pause. RICHARD almost cuts but holds)

Happy anniversary. RICHARD

Happy anniversary, Richard. PAM

(pause. RICHARD almost cuts but holds)

This'll be worth it. RICHARD

OK. PAM

I promise. RICHARD

Mmm. PAM

(pause. RICHARD almost cuts but holds)

We'll remember this meal for a long long time. RICHARD

Can we just...get on with it? PAM

RICHARD

(in a soothing voice)

All right. OK. That's good. He's calmer. Now hold still, Carl. You are in for a treat. You are about to be transformed from just another sheep in a field into something extraordinary. All it's gonna take is one deep-

(BLACKOUT. Music)

Act 1, Scene 2

(The Great room, cleaned up, ready for company. The box and newspaper are gone, the table is set.

There is a stain in the wood. A vase of the flowers that PAM bought sits on a dining table.

PAM, dressed for dinner, is on her hands and knees with a spray bottle and some steel wool. She is furiously scrubbing the spot.

Light mellow jazzy electronic music plays in the background.

PAM
(muttering)

Out.

(The DOORBELL rings)

PAM

Out!

(The DOORBELL rings again, twice)

PAM
(a mantra)

One basket. One glorious basket.

(LOUD, URGENT, KNOCKING on the front door. PAM pops out of her trance. In a quick-think move, she puts the vase of flowers in the lamb spot to cover the stain.

She opens the front door. It's WENDY, fashionably dressed in something earthy-sensual. Or perhaps leather? She holds four bottles of red and white wine.)

WENDY

Oh thank God!

PAM
Hello Wendy!

WENDY
Thank god you're all right!

PAM
I was here the whole time. I didn't-

(WENDY hugs PAM intensely, which
remains tight over the next several
lines)

PAM
Oh!

WENDY
You wouldn't believe the scenarios I was picturing out
there. "They forgot. They're not here. They're out
having fun. They were killed. Pam and Richard have been
killed and can't answer the door. Because they are dead."

PAM
We would never forget tonight.

WENDY
I am so happy you're not dead.

PAM
Me too.

(pause, still hugging)

WENDY
Oh Pam.

PAM
Wendy.

WENDY
You are the best hugger I have ever known.

PAM
You don't mean that.

WENDY

I mean it more than anything I've ever said. To be in these arms. This warmth. Not in the car.

PAM

I do love a good hug.

WENDY

You are healing me, Pam.

(pause)

PAM

Happy anniversary!

(WENDY pulls out of the hug)

WENDY

Another year.

PAM

Still together. The Fab Four. Forever!

WENDY

Look at us...

PAM

I know! Doesn't it seem like yesterday we were picking out our dresses for the-

WENDY

Look at us getting so old. The fresh sags. Sacs. Droops and clogs. Aches. Decay. Disappointments.

PAM

(laughing)

We're only Thirty-five, Wendy! We're still-

WENDY

Half way to Seventy, Pam. Half our cookie, nibbled.

PAM

We'll live a lot longer than seventy. Unless something awful happens.

WENDY

Our hearts will beat inside a flabby mound. I'd rather die. You look fabulous.

PAM

No I don't.

WENDY

Yes you do!

PAM

I was in a rush.

WENDY

You're as pretty as you were in high school.

PAM

I never thought I was all that—

WENDY

Prettier. You're glowing. Flushed. Holy Mother, you're pregnant!

PAM

No! I was just...cleaning. There was a bit of a—

WENDY

Age has been much kinder to you these years, Pam. You still look as fresh from the pasture as a spring—

PAM

Lines. On my face. I'm seeing lines.

WENDY

You're imagining them.

PAM

You look fantastic as always.

WENDY

Blah.

PAM

You do!

WENDY

Blah Blah. You say nice things, Pam. You always say nice things.

PAM

I mean them. You've always taken such good care of yourself.

WENDY

Pilates only goes so far. That's what the mirror tells me. The scale. The ambivalence of construction workers when I walk by.

God, I miss you.

PAM

I'm so glad we still do this.

WENDY

Who would think a bridge and a tunnel would make it so difficult to be with the ones you truly love?

PAM

Where's Tom?

WENDY

Who?

PAM

Your husband?

WENDY

Let's not spoil the moment just yet.

PAM

Is he not coming?

WENDY

He's parking. Tom is parking the car.

(pause)

Tom will be parking the car for quite some time.

PAM

Driving is the worst part about living in the city. Well, that and all the sadness.

WENDY

Well, Tom just loves to park. He insists on discovering the "perfect" spot. Apparently, there's some ephemeral parking spot quality that goes beyond enough space to fit the vehicle.

(pause)

Asshole.

PAM

Is everything OK?

WENDY

No. Yes. Some of our worst moments as a couple are in transit.

PAM

Well, good for you to get out of the car before things got really bad.

WENDY

Yes. Yes it was.

(pause)

PAM

Wendy?

WENDY

Maybe we should take trains. Maybe I should drive. Maybe I should divorce Tom.

PAM

You can do one without the other.

WENDY

Can I? Can I when they're really the same thing?

(pause)

How are you, Pam?

PAM

I'm fine.

WENDY

You look stiff.

PAM

Maybe a little sore from the gym.

WENDY

How are you *really*?

PAM

Well, it's silly, not a big, just, well, this afternoon, right here—

WENDY

I mean how are we all, really? How are we doing with our lives? Sometimes, I miss those 3rd grade report cards we used to get. When they evaluated your progress as a human. Teacher, God, Buddha, Mao, someone, tell me: Am I a check plus? Or just a check?

PAM

One teacher said I was like a puppy dog. That bothered me.

WENDY

It's good to know what you are like, Pam. Even if it hurts.
(she sniffs)
Richard is concocting something supernatural in there.

PAM

He'll come out when he hears a cork pop.

WENDY

Every year, he raises the bar. Last year, my God. Who knew a chicken would fit in a duck and then fit inside a turkey? I certainly didn't.

PAM

These are really great wines.

WENDY

That is a really great smell.

PAM

Can I just open any one?

WENDY

Which will go best with dinner?

PAM

The red.

WENDY

Oo. That suggests something bloody. Or pasta?

PAM

Bloody.

WENDY

I've been craving flesh all day.

What kind?

PAM

I'd rather not say.

WENDY

Then I shall guess.

(WENDY sniffs loudly, intensely,
investigatorially)

PAM

Wendy's famous nose.

WENDY

State champion. Never forget that.

PAM

I've never been very good at sensing.

(WENDY continues to smell, perhaps
raising her arms so that the chemicals
can seep through her tender underarm
skin.)

WENDY

Oh yes. A fresh, tender smell. Young. Innocent. Cute? Oh.
And that marvelous aroma of liquid fat that makes you feel
like you're home. Safe. He's using cumin isn't he?

PAM

I haven't been in there since he started cooking.

WENDY

Mmm. Nutty fabulous. Fresh. Bloody. Bloody and fresh.

That brings back memories.

(The cork pops. RICHARD enters,
wearing an apron that says "Richard!"
He holds a knife and an onion. He
walks towards the pot of flowers on the
ground, without seeing it.)

RICHARD

I just heard a cork! I smell perfume and tannins in the air
and, lo, mine eyes doth be-seeith the finest of beauties of
all California. Smite me now 'cause I'm in heaven!
Hahahahaha-

(RICHARD trips over the flowers)

RICHARD

Whoa!

PAM AND WENDY

Oh!

(RICHARD has fallen to the ground. He is silent, motionless. A beat.)

RICHARD

I'm OK. Richard is OK.

WENDY

(holding her chest)

My heart.

RICHARD

That was not the entrance I rehearsed.

PAM

I'm so sorry, I didn't-

RICHARD

There wasn't a vase in the middle of the room before.

PAM

I just put it there.

RICHARD

I have a knife in my hand. And an onion.

PAM

There was a stain on the floor.

RICHARD

So you put flowers over it?

PAM

I didn't want to see the stain.

WENDY

This is why we should all learn CPR.

RICHARD

Just a little fall.

WENDY
Today, maybe.

RICHARD
Hello, Wendy!

WENDY
Hello Richard.

(RICHARD and WENDY hug)

WENDY
You look perfect as always. Love the apron.

RICHARD
I made it for tonight.

PAM
It's a really dark stain.

RICHARD
You're going to be OK at the helm, tonight, Skipper?

PAM
Yes, Boat.

RICHARD
Steady as she goes?

(Do RICHARD and PAM exchange captain's salutes? RICHARD chuckles. WENDY shudders ever so slightly)

PAM
I'll get some paper towels.

(PAM exits to get paper towels. A moment of something between Richard and Wendy)

RICHARD
Hey now. Where's my Buddy?

WENDY
Circling the city streets, praying to Allah for a parking garage. He loves those.

RICHARD
No garages around here.

WENDY
Good.

RICHARD
I got scared he wasn't coming.

WENDY
Mmm.

RICHARD
Did Pam tell you what we're having?

WENDY
No no! I'm enjoying becoming engulfed in magic vapor. The mysteries of Richard.

RICHARD
I'm using cumin.

WENDY
And a cup of amazing!

RICHARD
It really is. I haven't felt like this about a project in a long time. Oh Wendy, it...
(a noise of excited wordlessness)
Aah! It feels like my whole life has led up to this day.

WENDY
Mine too.

(beat)

RICHARD
I want to tell you so bad what we're eating.

WENDY
Don't spoil the surprise, Richard. Let my nose and mouth make the discovery on their own.

RICHARD
Just like Columbus.