

BJ

Written by

Linda Freedman
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linda@thumbsuppartners.com
503-957-1160

EXT. MARGE'S AND KATHY'S HOUSE - DAY

Strollers, tricycles, kids' bikes scattered around the front yard of a mid-century ranch house. Balloons tied to the fence, trees festooned with streamers.

Sounds of *'Happy birthday, dear BJ!'* waft out the windows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

BJ (3) is sitting on the floor tearing open presents, showing each new item to OSCAR, a small stuffed toy with bright green fur and giant eyes. She ignores other children crowding around.

BJ is tiny for a three year-old, with dark eyes and long dark hair, intense gaze and furrowed brow. Wearing a pink T-shirt and purple pants. Mildly speech and developmentally delayed.

MARGE and KATHY (30s), BJ's foster moms, and half a dozen other MOTHERS sit nearby, trying to corral BABIES and TODDLERS. Older KIDS have escaped to the back yard.

Marge and Kathy are cousins, but are often mistaken for sisters. Short brown hair, soft hazel eyes -- as fit as they were when they were college doubles partners. Becoming foster parents flowed naturally from their simpatico relationship.

ERIN, mom of one of the toddlers, leans over to Marge.

ERIN

BJ's just beautiful, Marge. You and Kathy have done wonders with her.

MARGE

Thanks, it's been quite a journey. She still struggles with even the tiniest change in her routine. But when Carl gave Oscar to her, that was a real turning point...

ERIN

Any word on your efforts to adopt her?

MARGE

Nope. Child Welfare's convinced there's a relative somewhere. If so, they'd have priority over us foster parents.

ERIN

Even though they've never even met her?

MARGE

That's what's so crazy. We're the only parents she's ever known...

ERIN

That's insane...

MARGE

I don't even wanna think about what that would do to her -- and us.

EXT. MARGE'S AND KATHY'S HOUSE - DAY

A black and white police car pulls up to the curb. CARL (30s) slides out. Slender build, sandy hair, brown eyes, impeccable uniform. Looks like the kind of fresh-faced cop who gets assigned to show up at school assemblies. He's Kathy's brother.

Carl ambles to the door and slips in. Kids rush to greet him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

KATHY

(laughing)

Hi, Bro. Did neighbors call to complain about all the noise?

CARL

Yeah, said if I didn't shut down this chaos, they're gonna come haul away BJ's new toys -- *and* the birthday cake.

BJ joins the gaggle of kids surrounding Carl. She's grasping Oscar with one hand, tugs at Carl's sleeve with the other. Carl drops to his knees and holds out a small gift bag.

BJ

Whaa..?

CARL

Gonna be getting cold pretty soon, BJ. 'Specially at night. Here's something to help Oscar stay warm.

BJ tears open the bag and discovers a tiny plaid coat. Stares at it, then at Carl.

CARL (CONT'D)
It's for Oscar. See if it fits.

BJ struggles to get it on the toy. She finally succeeds, holds it out for Carl to see.

CARL (CONT'D)
You did it -- now Oscar can stay warm.

A SMALL BOY pushes to the front for a better look -- and tries to touch Oscar.

BJ lets out a shriek and flings herself at the toddler, fists flying, her face contorted in fury. Frightened, the child begins to wail.

Kathy pulls BJ off the boy and carries her a quiet corner to calm down. Toddler recovers. Party resumes.

LATER THAT DAY

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Marge and Kathy clean up after the birthday party. BJ's on the floor near them, taking Oscar's coat off, putting it back on.

Marge's cell phone rings. She picks up. Color drains from her face.

MARGE
(glances at Kathy)
Yes, tomorrow morning around ten would work. Yes, we'll both be here.

Hangs up, slumps into a chair.

KATHY
Who was that?

MARGE
Jordan, the social worker from Child Welfare. Said she has some news she wants to share with us.

They look at each other, faces grim.

KATHY
You don't think...

MARGE

I don't know, but I feel like I
just got hit by a two by four.

THE NEXT DAY

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Door bell rings. Kathy answers it, lets JORDAN in.

JORDAN

Hello Kathy, it's good to see you
again. I reviewed the notes from
our last meeting and am pleased BJ
is doing so well...

KATHY

Yes, she's is. Do you have news
about our application to adopt her?

Jordan hesitates, moves to the couch and sits.

Marge joins them.

JORDAN

Well, uh -- that's what I wanted to
talk with you about. You know when
you became BJ's foster parents, we
told you we'd keep looking for a
relative. And, that if we found
one, that person would have
priority...

MARGE

Are you saying you've found someone
related to BJ?

JORDAN

Yes, an uncle named Ryan Matheson.
He lives about half hour from here,
on his ranch, and is eager to have
BJ...

KATHY

You're planning to award custody to
someone who's never been in BJ's
life, ever? Rip her away from the
only moms she's ever known? YOU
CAN'T BE SERIOUS!

JORDAN

I'm sorry...

MARGE
YOU CAN'T DO THAT -- IT WOULD
DESTROY HER!

JORDAN
I know it's a tough blow, but...

KATHY
TOUGH BLOW? IT'S CRIMINAL -- AND
YOU KNOW HOW IT WOULD AFFECT HER.
OR ANY CHILD! Are you and your
colleagues insane? Is this what you
call 'in the best interest of the
child?'

JORDAN
I know how attached you've become
to BJ, but...

MARGE
BUT, WHAT? After what she went
through before coming to us? You're
gonna traumatize her, again?

JORDAN
I am truly sorry, but the protocol
is very clear. We need to schedule
a time for Ryan to come meet BJ and
a bit later, a date for him to take
custody.

TWO WEEKS LATER

EXT. MARGE'S AND KATHY'S HOUSE - DAY

A large black pickup pulls to the curb, thunder from its
muffler echoing through the neighborhood.

RYAN (30s) uncoils out the driver's door and stands gazing at
the house. He's over six feet tall, built like a fullback.
Reddish hair and beard, close cropped, military style
haircut. Wearing jeans, black T-shirt and cowboy boots.

He walks toward the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marge and Kathy meet Ryan at the door.

KATHY

Ryan, I'm Kathy and this is Marge.
As you can imagine, this is very,
very difficult for us...

RYAN

Yes, ma'am, I can understand that.
But I hope you can understand *my*
position. The rest of my family is
gone, including my brother, BJ's
dad. When I heard that BJ was
alive, I was so excited. And, to
find out that she's -- well, I just
had to...

Carl drives around corner, cuts the engine of his squad car
and coasts to a spot just behind Ryan's truck. Notes all the
details: license plate number, chrome silhouettes of the Mud
Flap Girl hanging behind the rear wheels, gun rack in the
rear window, busted tail light.

Carl walks toward the house and lets himself in.

Ryan senses that someone is behind him and turns to see Carl.
He can barely control his shock at the sight of a uniformed
police officer, but manages to maintain his composure.

KATHY

This is my brother, Carl. He's BJ's
favorite person...

CARL

Hello, Ryan. Can't say I'm happy to
meet you.

Ryan avoids Carl's eyes, turns back to Marge and Kathy.

MARGE

BJ's a little girl that's been
through more than most adults could
endure. Taking her...

RYAN

You don't have to worry, ma'am. I'm
gonna make sure she has everything
she needs. And that you two can
stay in close touch...

Ryan spots BJ, holding Oscar. She's backed herself into a
corner away from the adults. He moves towards her, his shadow
chasing her as she tries to scoot away. She starts to
whimper. When he reaches down to touch her, a wail escapes
from her...

Carl steps in, picks up BJ. She clings to him and Oscar, sobbing.

CARL

I think you should go...

RYAN

Yeah, sure. But I'll be back.

Ryan exits the house, slides into his pickup and roars off.

Marge and Kathy are beside themselves, both in tears, trying not to upset BJ, trying to cope with a nightmare turned real. Carl, seething, tries to comfort BJ.

TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marge, Kathy and Carl watch as Ryan saunters up the sidewalk. Same jeans, T-shirt and cowboy boots. A ring of keys dangles from his belt.

Boxes of BJ's clothes and toys are stacked near the door.

BJ, hands grasping Oscar, is clinging to Carl. When Ryan moves towards her, she buries her face in Carl's chest.

MARGE

Ryan, we're pleading with you not to do this. BJ has never been away from us. She can't tolerate changes. Even little things upset her. Please reconsider...

Ryan looks down at her, his lips curling into a thin half-smile.

RYAN

Not gonna happen. She's kin and I want her with me.

BJ begins to cry, then screams. Full meltdown. Kathy, Carl and Marge try to comfort her, but...

Ryan moves in, towers over her. She screams and kicks at him, tries to hold on to Carl. Ryan reaches in, his giant hands pinning her arms to her sides, and jerks her away.

BJ out of control, sobbing, screaming, snot running down her face, her pants soaked with urine. She arches back into an impossible angle...

CARL
You're hurting her. PUT HER DOWN.
NOW!

Carl moves towards Ryan, hands coiled into fists. Ryan, a full head taller, stands his ground, smirking.

RYAN
I've got a signed paper saying
she's mine, *officer*. So, unless
you've got a court order, you're
not in a position to tell me what
to do about *anything* that involves
this kid.

EXT. MARGE'S AND KATHY'S HOUSE - DAY

Ryan barges out the door with BJ. Flings open the passenger door of the pickup, slams her into the passenger seat and forces her into a seat belt.

BJ's screams can be heard over the screech of the tires and the roar of the muffler as the pickup speeds away from the curb.

NEXT DAY

INT. MARGE'S AND KATHY'S HOUSE - DAY

Marge and Kathy are beside themselves. They call Ryan's number every hour. No answer.

MARGE
I can't stand this. Let's drive
over there and...

KATHY
Jordan said we could be arrested if
we go to his house without
permission...

MARGE
I don't care. We can drive by...

EXT. RYAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The house sits at the end of a dirt road, surrounded by woods so thick almost no light filters through to the ground.

The house is dark, shades drawn, the yard covered by a dense tangle of blackberry vines.

Ryan's pickup is in the driveway, but there's no sign of him or BJ.

INT. MARGE'S CAR - DAY

Marge and Kathy sit in the car, straining to detect any sound or movement.

After an hour, they drive away.

The next day, same scenario. Pickup in the driveway, no sign of life.

They come back every day for a week.

On the seventh day, the pickup is gone. Marge notices something lying beside the driveway.

EXT. RYAN'S HOUSE -DAY

They creep toward the house. It's Oscar, his coat and one eye gone, his green fur torn and covered with brown stains.

CATHY

OH MY GOD! OH MY GOD! She'd never
leave Oscar...

Cathy and Marge run to the front door and start pounding on it. Nothing. They charge to the back door and try to force their way in there. No luck.

Desperate, they scream...

KATHY

BJ! BJ! IT'S YOUR MOMS! BJ, ARE YOU
IN THERE?

MARGE

CALL CARL! HURRY -- CALL CARL!

Kathy fumbles for her phone, finally reaches Carl.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

CARL

Hang on. I'll be right there.

CARL (CONT'D)

(to desk sergeant)
Code two seven eight.
(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)

Three year old female,
approximately 28 pounds, brown
hair, brown eyes. Suspect: white
male, reddish brown buzz cut,
beard, brown eyes, six foot, 200
pounds. Driving black RAM pickup,
Oregon license eight six zero Alpha
Charley Hotel. All units to 2349
Barstow Lane, Carlton.

EXT. RYAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Carl's squad car screeches to a stop, followed by half dozen others, an ambulance and fire and rescue vehicles. Marge and Kathy fling themselves into his arms, too upset to speak.

He pulls away, sprints to the front door and kicks it open.

INT. RYAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Carl rushes from room by room. The stench is overwhelming, covers his nose with a handkerchief.

He discovers a closet with an open padlock hanging on the hasp, opens the door and gasps. BJ's blood-stained underwear and pink T-shirt on the floor, feces smeared on the walls. A thin, urine soaked blanket.

He staggers back, notices drops of blood leading towards the back door. Steps outside and spots boot prints in the dirt, heading toward the woods.

Carl, Kathy, Marge and first responders comb the woods. It's getting dark. Flashlights bounce off the trees. Muffled sounds of searchers. Chatter from police radios.

Barely a hundred yards from the house, the light from Carl's flashlight lands on a small mound of fresh dirt. He drops to the ground and digs furiously with his bare hands and finds...

BJ's nude, battered body, her tiny fists grasping Oscar's plaid jacket and tufts of his green fur.