

IMMINENT DOMAIN

by
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SYD, late 30s / early 40s, is talking on his cellphone inside his living room in a tiny 1920s wood clapboard beach house in Venice Beach, California. The interior is rustic with lots of beams and original details. Upstage, is a second floor loft bedroom that is accessible by a ladder. A kitchen and bathroom are off stage right. Windows to the street are stage left.

SYD: That's wonderful ... No, no, it's really - ... How much? ... Crazy! But I didn't even -... No, I'm not arguing, I'm just saying - Well, I'm amazed ... On top of that? ... So you're saying royalties aren't even part of the -... And that can turn into a lot? ... Holy - Does that mean -... No, it's not believable to me, that's all I'm sayin - ... No, no, I believe you it's just, well, it's not even completely finished and they're still - ... No, I'm not complaining ... It's just, wow! I'm definitely not used to this. Can I take you for dinner? ... No, no, any restaurant you want ... Seriously? That's what you want - ... No, something more expensive ... I know you don't, but I just feel undeserving and want to show you my apprecia -

CARRIE, mid/ late 30s, 8 months pregnant, enters carrying 4 heavy Trader Joe's bags filled with groceries.

CARRIE: Fuck!

Syd holds up a finger (moment) ...

CARRIE: Did you see?

SYD: Sounds great ...

CARRIE: I mean, how much more obnoxious can you get?

SYD: Look, Carrie just walked in and I have to -... No, that's perfect. I'll get right on it and send it to you by Monday. It's just I have to help her with - ... I'll tell her ... Okay, will do ... Thanks again.

He hangs up.

SYD: (Concerned.) What are you doing?

CARRIE: What does it look like I'm doing?

SYD: You shouldn't be carrying all those bags.

CARRIE: Thank you for telling me something I don't know. I had to walk three blocks!

SYD: That's crazy.

CARRIE: What else was I supposed to do? There's a huge jalopy's parked right outside our house.

SYD: A what?

CARRIE: A fucking RV! The size of a cruise ship. Thing takes up five spaces. Plus, it's a nice day, and with all the beach traffic, took me twenty minutes to find a spot.

SYD: You should've called me.

CARRIE: (Showing him the cell screen) Hello! I tried you three times!

SYD: (Looking at his phone.) Oh, sorry ...

CARRIE: Yeah.

SYD: That was Charles.

CARRIE: And?

SYD: Well ...

CARRIE: You gave it your best shot.

SYD: Actually, they bought it!

CARRIE: What?!

SYD: Yeah!

CARRIE: No fucking way!

SYD: Isn't it crazy? I mean, I have to make a few small changes, but basically it's a done deal.

CARRIE: How much?

SYD: Guess.

CARRIE: Come on, don't torture me ... 30 thousand?

SYD: Double it.

CARRIE: Get out!

SYD: And add 5 ... 65 thousand dollars!

CARRIE: Shut up!

SYD: And if it's actually made, they pay another 65. And then if it goes to series, we're talking -

CARRIE: I'll never have to go back to work again -- unless I want to.

SYD: And the best part ... In three months, health care kicks in, which covers everything.

CARRIE: Oh my God, I'm so sick of going to clinics.

SYD: Covers dental, chiropractors, specialists -

CARRIE: I can finally get that mole under my boob removed.

SYD: Even therapy - not that we need it.

CARRIE: Didn't I tell you if you took a risk, good things would happen?

SYD: Do you know how many hours of tutoring it would take me to make that kind of money?

CARRIE: Forget those brats.

SYD: Not to mention how many plays I'd have to write.

CARRIE: What did a couple of good reviews get you? Zilch! Theatre's dead, everyone knows that. All the best writers are in television.

SYD: I guess ...

CARRIE: Don't -

SYD: I can't help it -

CARRIE: Stop -

SYD: It's just I feel unworthy.

CARRIE: Can't you be happy for once in your life?

SYD: I'm always happy ... But it's 24 pages of dialogue! Double spaced!

CARRIE: How many lines are in a *Haiku*?

SYD: I knocked it out in two weeks. And the story line is completely formulaic.

CARRIE: I'm sure you put your own twist on it. Besides, you got to add up all the time you spent developing your craft, all the rejections, doors slammed in your face ...

SYD: That's true.

CARRIE: Probably only comes out to a few bucks an hour.

SYD: I know, but it still feels wrong.

CARRIE: This is no time to be idealistic. You're in the door! And just at the right time. (Speaking to her stomach.) Daddy's not going to be a failed writer after all.

SYD: Is that what you think of me?

CARRIE: (Going to hug him.) Not anymore.

A large engine with a broken muffler starts up outside and noise roars through the house.

SYD: What the hell is that?

CARRIE: I told you; those are our new neighbors. Didn't you hear them pull in?

SYD: I must've been distracted.

CARRIE: The thing's a wreck - all being held together with chicken wire and duct tape. I mean, of all places to park, why do it on this tiny street, right in front of our house?

SYD: Sounds like they're moving out.

The engine cuts off.

CARRIE: Trust me, they're here for the long haul.

SYD: How do you know?

CARRIE: Four wood blocks jammed under the tires, turf marked out with a couple of orange pylons, and all the windows are rolled up, covered in cellophane to block out the sunlight.

SYD: Not a good sign.

CARRIE: He's even chained his bike to the pole.

SYD: Which pole?

CARRIE: The pole outside our house.

SYD: You mean where I usually lock my bike?

CARRIE: Yes! The parking sign pole! ... Take a look.

Syd goes to the window and looks out through the blinds.

SYD: That's my pole!

CARRIE: Do you understand now?

SYD: Although, technically, it's city property.

CARRIE: Which we pay taxes for!

SYD: (Observing) The thing's bigger than this house.

CARRIE: License plate's from Michigan.

SYD: Titanic.

CARRIE: Exactly!

SYD: No, it actually has "Titanic" painted on the side.

CARRIE: (Getting emotional.) We're so fucked!

SYD: Let's not let this spoil the moment.

CARRIE: (Stressed.) I mean, it's bad enough that we were in lock down for months. Now we're being boxed in by vagrants.

SYD: That's no way to speak of them; they're people too.

CARRIE: ... Barely.

SYD: Carrie!

CARRIE: It's a fucking health hazard, Syd. They shit in our alleys, piss all over the lawns.

SYD: I know, let's go out for dinner!

CARRIE: Yesterday, I saw two homeless guys sitting outside their tent, shooting heroin while barbecuing over a Hibachi.

SYD: Let's splurge. We can go to *Cafe Gratitude*.

CARRIE: I'm too tired to go out.

SYD: You can order anything you want. How about "I am Wholesome"?

CARRIE: It's, "I am Whole" ... And I'm in no mood to deal with their cheery wait staff.

SYD: What about *Green Leaf*?

CARRIE: I just want to stay home and relax! They've been piling a ton of work on me, trying to get the most out of me before I leave.

SYD: That's exploitation! Do you want me to talk to that lawyer, Leopold, I take stretch classes with?

CARRIE: I haven't exactly been up front with them about quitting once maternity runs out.

SYD: Give me a break; you work for a pharmaceutical company and they don't even offer health care? If anything, they owe you.

CARRIE: I won't argue with that.

The RV starts up again.

SYD: There, you see? ... All that worrying for nothing ...

The engine cuts off again, with a final sound of sputtering air.

CARRIE: I think they're trying to torture us.

SYD: Or maybe they're having trouble with the engine. (Going toward the closet.) I have some jumper cables I can -

CARRIE: (Blocking him.) Are you crazy? Do you know what happens if you engage with these people?

SYD: They peck your eye balls out?

CARRIE: And shit all over your head. Trust me, we have to attack this aggressively, before they get settled in. Let them know that there's going to be a price to pay if they want to set up camp 10 feet from our window.

SYD: Didn't you get all the neighbors to sign that petition, prohibiting oversized vehicles from parking overnight?

CARRIE: Six months ago!

SYD: And?

CARRIE: Obviously, we're still waiting!

SYD: Maybe we should give the city a call and see what's holding things up.

CARRIE: Don't you think I did that 20 thousand times?

SYD: There's no need to get hostile; I'm not the enemy.

CARRIE: The last person I spoke to tore into me about wasting "valuable city resources" on such an insignificant matter.

SYD: That's not right.

CARRIE: Not right? Where have you been? ... Remember how long it took for the police to come after that gang-banger shooting outside the public housing project?

SYD: That was unfortunate. I still think about it every time I pass the corner.

CARRIE: (Almost in tears.) This is the world our child is being born into, and you know what the message from the city is? You're on our own!

Syd goes over to the window and looks trough the blinds, feeling pressure to act in some way.

SYD: I mean you'd think they'd be happier in the mountains where there's more of a breeze, like Malibu, or the Palisades, even Santa Monica.

CARRIE: Those cities restrict non-resident overnight parking, which - surprise-surprise - happens to be where all the homeless advocates live.

SYD: Although, technically, these people aren't homeless. I believe the correct term is *Boondockers*.

Carrie gives Syd a dirty look.

SYD: I'm just saying ...

CARRIE: They're leaches on society.

SYD: (Getting an idea.) Wait a minute!

CARRIE: What?

SYD: Remember that guy, Alphonse?

CARRIE: The Hispanic man that helped you carry the couch in?

SYD: Right. Well, he told me about this obscure law that prohibits any vehicle from being parked in the same spot for more than 36 hours.

CARRIE: Presuming Parking Enforcement even shows up -

SYD: That's the thing: he got tired of waiting on the city to ticket this truck, that he bought some chalk and marked the tires himself.

CARRIE: And they left?

SYD: Yes, they got completely spooked - ... (Remembering.)

CARRIE: And ...

SYD: Well, they figured out that if they moved the truck a few inches every couple of days, the city wouldn't be able to - ... (Off Carrie's skeptical look.) But these people are from out-of-state so maybe they'll fall for it.

CARRIE: You really think they care about parking tickets? They probably don't even have a home address to send a summons.

SYD: All right, fine, forget it ... But today's Friday - the next street cleaning's Wednesday. That's only five days from now! Let's just grin and bear it, and then on Wednesday, I'll make sure to park our car in front of the house before they can move it back.

CARRIE: I need the car to go to the gynecologist on Wednesday.

SYD: Then I'll rent one.

CARRIE: Do you understand how ridiculous that is?

SYD: (Losing it.) Not as ridiculous as to how much time we're spending on this! I'm doing my best to come up with a solution to satisfy your needs, but all you do is shoot everything down. Instead of us feeling joyful that we won't have to skimp on everything anymore, or ask your parents for money, or have to go another winter without heat, we're focussing on an existential threat that doesn't really exist if we just don't look out the window and pretend it's not there!

CARRIE: (Not listening to him.) I know, let's call 9-1-1.

SYD: You mean 3-1-1. 9-1-1's for emergencies.

CARRIE: What do you think this is?

SYD: NOT an emergency.

Carrie starts sniffing and moves closer to the window. Syd trails behind, also sniffing.

SYD: What?

CARRIE: Smoke.

SYD: I don't smell it.

CARRIE: Stand over here.

She moves him; he sniffs.

SYD: Cigarettes?

CARRIE: That's not cigarettes. That's an illegal substance.

SYD: You really think the cops are going to come out to Venice because somebody's smoking a joint? It's the official scent of the neighborhood.

CARRIE: No, but they might come out if somebody's free-basing in a suspicious looking RV, 10 feet from the window of a gestating mother who's feeling faint.

SYD: Carrie, no.

CARRIE: Why are their rights more important than mine?

SYD: They're not, but can we at least agree to operate within the boundaries of human decency and respect the law?

CARRIE: We know nothing about them or what's going on in there!

SYD: As it should be.

CARRIE: Let the police investigate. Maybe they'll uncover something else.

SYD: That's called profiling, and it's illegal.

CARRIE: For all we know, they can be child molesters or pregnant-mother-rapists, or maybe they're even - (Getting an idea.) ...

SYD: What?!

CARRIE: (Whispering.) Terrorists ...

SYD: Terrorists would not be operating out of a beat up RV called *Titanic*.

CARRIE: That's exactly how they'd be operating. The FBI always warns people to contact them if they see anything suspicious.

SYD: So now you want to get the federal government involved?

CARRIE: Don't you remember what happened in Riverside before that Moslem shot up the gay night club? Everyone had their suspicions, but nobody did anything.

SYD: I refuse to be a part of this.

CARRIE: So we're just going to sit here, hostages in our own home?

SYD: I'll take care of it tomorrow - if they're still here.

CARRIE: Oh, they'll be here, I guarantee it.

SYD: Then I'll take care of it.

CARRIE: Because you need to step up and be a man.

SYD: I am a man.

CARRIE: Protect your family.

SYD: For the last time, I'll take care of it!

CARRIE: Promise?

SYD: Yes!!!

CARRIE: You don't have to yell.

Beat.

CARRIE: (Unable to contain herself.) I just don't see how in the 21st Century, in the richest country in the world, this is allowed to happen. (Syd closes his eyes and tries to escape.) ... Syd?

SYD: What?

CARRIE: I think it's great you sold your pilot.

SYD: Thanks.

CARRIE: Let's just pretend they're not here.

SYD: Good idea.

Black out.