

Not About You

By Dean MacAllister

The weather today was forecast to be wet and miserable, with a chance of mourning.

Rebecca put on a blouse, the third she had tried so far, while staring at herself in the mirror. She didn't own much black clothing, so if this top wasn't just right then she would have to go out and buy a new one. Straightening it out, she appraised her reflection. The top showed off a hint of a bra, with just the right amount of cleavage. Modest enough not to look slutty. Sexy enough to draw the attention she required. Perfect. She smiled. She felt calmer now.

The rant she had in the shower had been rehearsed over and over again, until she memorised every wrong that he had done her. It was therapeutic, spitting out your grievances into the echo of a steamy bathroom, the hot water washing your vitriol down the sink as you vented. Every scene seemed to replay itself off the shower screen, projecting memories of sleights and arguments, disappointments and frustrations. She had scrubbed herself raw until the water had run cold.

Rebecca turned to her side, her eyes running up and down her figure. She had always been a thin girl, but she was slowly developing some curves now she had reached her thirties. Despite a couple of grey hairs, her long, straight black hair was well looked after. She had once been told that she would have been such a beautiful girl, if she could only stop frowning. She tried to walk around with a smile after being told that, but after only a few hours her scowl had returned to rest on her face.

What was there in life to smile about?

What was the point of any of it?

The one thing she had wanted was out of her reach now, unobtainable more than ever before. He was gone. Gone without ever providing what she needed most. How selfish a man he was, to leave without even saying goodbye, without giving her the affirmation she had needed so badly. Life had always been about him; what he wanted, what he needed to achieve. She always had to compete to catch his eye. To get his attention. But today she would get the attention that she deserved. If they weren't willing to give it to her, then she would take it.

Sitting down at her vanity table she studied her face. Deep lines were etched across her forehead, ones that refused to disappear even when she forced a smile. It gave her a constantly serious look that made her rare laughter alarming for those who witnessed it, as if it was a howl of pain rather than that of pleasure. The few attempts she had made at online dating seemed quickly to come to an end when her laughter escaped. She tried her best to suppress it, but it would claw its way out, a sad and nervous bark, giving the impression of desperation hiding just beneath the skin.

Applying red lipstick carefully, she made a kiss-face to check that it was on properly. She gave the tiniest of smiles, the kind that you would give to a stranger in the street, or to the person packing your groceries. It was the best that she could do.

She looked at her watch. 10 am.

The service would have started by now.

Taking a deep breath, she stared at her pale reflection, trying not to hate what she saw. She sighed loudly, her exclamation ringing out in the large, empty house. Grabbing her handbag, she put on her shoes and opened the front door.

Outside the rain had died down to a light drizzle. The dark clouds gave the impression that it was early evening. She dashed for her car. The car's interior lights turned on as she approached and, sensing the keys in her pocket, unlocked itself as she grabbed the door handle. Jumping in, she lowered the visor and re-checked her makeup. Her mascara had already begun to run. Taking a small packet of tissues out of her handbag, she tried to fix it up as best she could. She pushed the ignition button on the dash and the car woke up, loudly at first, but dying down as the motor warmed up. The automatic wipers turned on and she pulled out onto the road.

There weren't many cars out on this overcast Sunday morning. Most people would have been relaxing with their families, stoking their fireplaces while watching television, getting cosy under blankets. But attending his funeral, Rebecca couldn't think of anywhere she would rather be today. Today they would shut up and listen. Today they wouldn't be able to ignore her. Today she would have her turn to speak.

She looked down at her speed and eased her foot off the accelerator. It would not do to be pulled over by the police before she got there. Not today. Not on her day.

The traffic lights seemed to be on her side and it wasn't long before she was pulling up into the parking lot of the church. Driving around she realised every parking spot had been taken. How inconsiderate! Yes she had turned up late, but they should have left her a parking space! She would have words with someone the next day about this.

Exiting the car park she drove down the road until she found a spot, nearly a block away. She got out of the car, cursing as her heels dug into the mud of the nature strip. Awkwardly she stormed up the footpath, the light rain again causing her makeup to run. It began to get into her eyes and she wiped them with the back of her hands, realising too late that she had probably just made things worse.

By the time she walked up the stairs to the church she was furious. Her hair and clothes were sodden and any earlier attempts she had made of improving her looks were rapidly undoing themselves. If she would have to give her speech looking like she had swum fully-clothed to the church, then so be it. The piece of her mind that she was going to give to all those inside had just grown a little larger.

Pushing the heavy doors open she stumbled into the foyer. An attendant standing there gave her a surprised look and hurried over.

"Would you like a service pamphlet?" he offered, fumbling with a pile of cardboard programs.

"I am absolutely drenched! Do I look like I need a pamphlet right now?" She bellowed, frowning with disbelief.

"No, of course not," he said nervously, accidentally dropping a few. He picked them up and rushed over to the sign-in table. He returned with a box of tissues. She grabbed a handful and started dabbing at her eyes. She was starting to blink now. Her mascara was a new one that she had only bought recently. She seemed to be having a reaction to it. The tissues she used were stained, like Rorschach ink blots. All that time she had spent doing her makeup, wasted. She threw them on the floor with disgust.

"Get out of my way," she said, pushing the small man aside. She slammed through the interior doors into the church.

The building was utterly intimidating and she stopped for a second to take it all in. The ceiling was stories high, painted with epic classical portrayals of violent bible scenes surrounded by countless angels. The gold borders shone brightly accentuating the colours. She could picture herself in one of these scenes, her suffering immortalised for all to see.

Rebecca's eyes slowly fell on the large crowd on both sides of the church. Most faces were looking back at her and the well-dressed man on the stage had paused mid-sentence. He cleared his throat and continued.

"He was one of the most generous people I have ever known. I am grateful for my time with him. He definitely enriched those around him and I feel that I am a better person for his brief role in my life," he said. Gradually everyone turned their attention back to him.

Of course, she thought. Everyone was going to focus on his charity work. On his deeds. On his accomplishments. Let's all just forget about the man that he truly was.

Picking up her courage, Rebecca stomped her way down the aisle towards the stage. She ascended the stairs, trying not to lose her balance and stood next to the man, glaring at him. His eyes opened wide and his chubby face reddened.

"Yes, well, I um... I just wanted to say that he was a good man and he will always be remembered for what he gave back to the community. Uh, thank you," the man said, gathering up his notes before hastily making his way down the stairs. A few people clapped politely and the crowd quietened. She had the stage.

Rebecca wiped her eyes. The lights seemed brighter than expected and she squinted.

"My..." she started. Her voice caught and she coughed into her hand. She grunted, trying to expel the frog in her throat. "My father was not the man that you all thought he is. Was. He... he never abused me in any physical way, I'm not saying that or anything."

People in the audience began to murmur and she could hear people tutting with disapproval.

"Hey! He was my father and I am going to have my say!" She yelled into the microphone, causing a ringing sound.

This seemed to cause even more of a stir in the crowd, some people turning around to speak to those behind them

"You don't know what I have been through! I have had a difficult life. It wasn't easy being the middle child. Yes, we were well off. Yes, he was kind when he spent time with us. But I had to compete with all the charities and all the functions and all the benefits..."

Heads in the crowd were beginning to shake and she tried searching for faces she knew, but her eyes were filling with tears. She wiped them with her sleeves.

"He never had time for me! He didn't tell me he loved me enough," she said between sobs. "Even his death was selfishly sudden, like he couldn't even stay alive long enough to say goodbye to me." Everything she had memorised, her rehearsed list of grievances were eluding her now.

The grumbling in the crowd was getting louder and a few people were even standing up to leave.

"What about me?!" Rebecca screamed. "Why doesn't anyone care about how this affects me? You were never there, daddy!" Rebecca cried, turning to face the casket.

Her eyes blurred and she stared at the enlarged black and white photo. His face was smiling, as if amused by her tears. As if this scene she was creating was entertaining him. As if he was grinning inside the coffin. As if he still didn't care about how she felt.

The crowd was getting louder. Shouts echoed in the large wooden interior.

His face in the photo was grinning from ear to ear. It was young and handsome. It was a proud face. It was a warm and confident face. It was an unfamiliar face.

Rebecca's pulse began to race and her breathing became difficult. She groaned loudly. Her legs buckled beneath her and she used the lectern to lower herself to the floor, her mind reeling. She frowned, trying to remember.

The service was today, wasn't it?