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War

by Fred Rohan Vargas

At rise: Milton is waiting patiently in a courthouse room. He is looking out the window, facing the audience. He's about to smoke a cigarette but pulls out an empty pack from his pocket. Throwing it in the trash can, he pulls out a fresh pack but decides not to smoke. He continues to look outside and begins to make pigeon sounds to get the pigeons' attention. Diane enters. Milton quickly turns around. There's a moment of silence until Milton breaks the ice.

MILTON

(feeling a little anxious) I'm just looking at the view. We're pretty high up here. (pause)
Cigarette?

DIANE

(stolid) I gave it up.

MILTON

Oh.

Diane sits herself down by the conference table that's positioned in the middle. More silence.

MILTON

Well, I guess we shouldn't beat around the bush. You know how I feel. That hasn't changed... But you have.

DIANE

(stares at him in disgust) What kind of person are you?!

MILTON

Me?! I told you where I stood. I never made any false pretense about it.

DIANE

That's still not going to change the fact that he's your child.

MILTON

Is he? After all, we met on loose terms.

Diane gets up and starts to leave.

MILTON

Where are you going? No, wait! (stops her at the door) I'm sorry! Please. Let's talk?

DIANE

Why? You know how it's going to end.

MILTON

Maybe. (with a wry smile) But then again, why should we lose our money to lawyers?

Diane looks at him with a slight disdain but goes back to her chair.

MILTON cont'd

Thanks. What you're asking for, I think, is pretty unreasonable.

DIANE

Then give up smoking.

MILTON

(feigning a smile) You always did know the right things to say.

DIANE

I'm raising a three month old baby on my own. How did you expect me to respond?

MILTON

But whose fault is that?!

DIANE

Yours!

MILTON

Mine?! You were the one on the pill.

DIANE

(sarcastically) What a great revelation? Now, that we know I'm part of that one percentile the pill didn't work for, the fact of the matter is... we have a child.

MILTON

Which could've been avoided! Why couldn't you have gone with the abortion? I was willing to pay for it.

DIANE

It wasn't an easy decision to make.

MILTON

But it was made nonetheless without me.

DIANE

It's my body.

MILTON

Oh, so that's all that matters? We fuck and if anything goes wrong it's your decision to make because it's your body. But at whose expense, Diane? I told you I didn't want to father a child.

MILTON cont'd

You know that wasn't even a consideration in our relationship.

DIANE

You think I intended for this to happen?

MILTON

I don't know. You always seemed concerned that your biological clock was ticking. What am I suppose to think?

DIANE

Is that your excuse?

MILTON

What do you mean my excuse?! You women today are such, such... hypocrites! You demand equality but what you really want is a double standard.

DIANE

Who do you think we learned it from? Now that the tables are turned, slightly, maybe it'll force you to see what we had to put up with for centuries.

MILTON

And you don't think, in all that time, we haven't been lured into your web of deceit?! Sometimes, you women are no different than a black widow spider that kills her mate after she has no use for him.

DIANE

There you go again... always assuming you could have your cake and eat it too!

MILTON

What the hell is having a cake, if I can't eat the goddamn thing?!

DIANE

I rest my case.

MILTON

You know that's not fair. I'm an actor. You knew that when we hooked up. I'm still struggling.

DIANE

And what makes you think I'm not? If everything is so grand for me, do you think I'd be here in this sterile room with you? The truth of the matter is I don't want your money. But I can't be so selfish and try to live on my pride and not think of Justin.

MILTON

Is that what you named him?

DIANE

Justin Michael. He's named after my father.

MILTON

Oliver would've been a much better choice.

DIANE

Oliver? Who on earth would name their son Oliver?

MILTON

Well, my parents for one. It compliments Milton. And if he's my kid then I should have something to say about it.

DIANE

Milton Oliver? Christ! If I knew that was your middle name, I'd have changed it for you the minute we met.

MILTON

See-See! That's the trouble with you. You always have to be in control. (Beat) Does he have my last name?

DIANE

No. He has mine.

MILTON

Why?!

DIANE

Because we met on "loose terms," remember?

MILTON

Okay, okay enough with your snide remarks. The fact of the matter is I shouldn't be held responsible. Look. I'm still waiting on tables. There is no way I can give up what little salary I make. And if I have to, well, then forget it. I might as well live out on the street.

DIANE
So that's it?

MILTON
Well, yeah!

DIANE
Then why are we here? Why are we waiting for a counselor to come and try to resolve our problem?

MILTON
But I didn't make it a problem. You did.

DIANE
Are we going back to finger pointing?

MILTON
In all honesty, Diane. Don't you believe that I should have rights? That I should be able to decide whether I want a baby or not?

DIANE
You decided that when you slept with me.

MILTON
You're not being objective.

DIANE
Objective?! What do you want me to say mea culpa, mea culpa?

MILTON
It's a start.

DIANE
The trouble with you Milton "Olivier"...

MILTON
Let's not get personal! Either say it right or don't say it at all.

DIANE
Alright, Deadbeat! How can you sit there and, honestly, feel justified believing the burden is mine?

MILTON
Because you made the choice and I trusted you. You could've taken other precautions, if you felt

the pill wasn't right for you.

DIANE

And what about you?

MILTON

What about me? (Diane throws him a look) Alright, Alright! I'm willing to admit that maybe...

DIANE

Maybe?!

MILTON

Alright, I should've taken precautions as well. But what control do I have after the fact? It's your body and I can't tell you what to do with it. So where does that leave me? I'll tell you. It leaves me at your mercy.

DIANE

Oh, give me a break! You, you don't know what I went through. My body changed with this living thing inside of me knowing he would be an extension of us. So when I had to decide, whether to keep him or get rid of him, keeping him became an option to consider in hopes that it could've been the best thing to happen to us. And getting rid of him... less of an option just knowing it might be a mistake that I will have to live with for the rest of my life. (pause)

MILTON

Believe me. I-I understand the tough decision you had to make. But you're not the only one who has to face it. Okay, I know I don't have to go through the physical changes you do. And that's my point. No matter how I feel and what actions I want to take, the bottom line is that you have options that I don't.

DIANE

And that makes me the fortunate bitch?

MILTON

It puts you at an advantage.

DIANE

Why is it always about you? Can't you, for once, think about someone else instead of yourself?

MILTON

I did! That's why I'm in this fucking mess. Because I was catering to your needs. Your feelings. And thinking less about mine.

DIANE

Oh, come on! You were the one who didn't want to use protection. Had I any sense, at the time, I wouldn't have been so stupid to play Russian roulette on my life. (as an afterthought) ...My

God! You're not HIV positive, are you?

MILTON

That hurt.

DIANE

Well, how do you think your nearsighted point of view makes me feel?!...Humph! Rights. What about the baby's?

MILTON

(overreacting) He's a victim just like me!

DIANE

Fuck you!

MILTON

Why must you always come off like that?

DIANE

Like what?

MILTON

See! You're doing it again.

DIANE

Doing what?!

MILTON

You're throwing me that snide, condescending look.

DIANE

Tough!

MILTON

That's what I hate about you! You love to humiliate me.

DIANE

Oh, grow up!

MILTON

That's it!

Infuriated, Milton lifts up one pant leg and pulls out a deck of cards and slams it on the table.

Deal!
MILTON

You're not serious?
DIANE

For God sake, just deal the cards!
MILTON

It's not going to work this time.
DIANE

Just deal?!
MILTON

Diane pauses a moment, then shuffles the cards, offers a cut and deals.

DIANE
Ever since you've gone through therapy, you think cards can resolve everything.

MILTON
Quit sounding so skeptical. You know, that's a strong trait that runs in your family?

DIANE
Oh, shut up and play.

Milton throws out the first card. They are playing a game of "War." She is getting the better of him.

DIANE
(smirks) You call yourself a card player?

MILTON
I'm just showing a bit of courtesy before the final blow.

DIANE
Curtsy me after I kick your ass.

They both become intense, increasing the rhythm of their playing.

MILTON
Some attitude, Diane... I can see where your father's arrogance went.

DIANE

He was a diehard. He never walked away without finishing what he started, unlike some people.

MILTON

WAR! (throws four cards out, first three down) I-de-clare-war!

Diane does the same thing but without saying I-de-clare-war. He wins.

MILTON

Gotcha! (chuckles and sings the song "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Know") Ain't no stoppin' me now. I'm in a groove...(hums the song) Ain't no stoppin' me now. You got no moves.

Milton continues to hum the song as they still play.

DIANE

You have a very aggressive personality. Have you ever talked to your therapist about it?

MILTON

(concentrating on the game) If I recall, that's what you liked about me.

DIANE

I told you that?

MILTON

Of course, you did. You said a man would have to be on his toes to be with you.

DIANE

And where did you get aggression out of that?

MILTON

Well, what else could you have meant?

DIANE

I was referring to wit. Be at his wit. Use his brain instead of his brawn.

MILTON

WAR! I-de-clare-war. Ha, ha!

He wins her hand again and shortly after, all her cards too.

MILTON

Now, wasn't that relaxing?

DIANE

It was luck.

MILTON

You were never a good loser.

DIANE

You were never someone I could share some of my interests with... except for playing a game of War.

MILTON

You got to start somewhere. (Beat) Ah, Diane. What's happening to us? Look at where we are. When I met you, I never thought I'd end up in a courtroom with you as my enemy.

DIANE

Is that what you see me as? Your enemy?

MILTON

You're filing for child support.

DIANE

Is there no place in your heart you could find a little love for him?

MILTON

What a silly question. Of course I could, but...

DIANE

Then try! Alright, I admit that I do have some advantages over you, but he's here now. And I can't do it alone.

MILTON

I know. You wouldn't have gone this far to bring my ass to court. Look. What do you say we forget about all of this and go for a cup of coffee? (pulling a ticket out of his pocket) Besides, I think our counselor will be detained for awhile with couple 142.

DIANE

I know. I overheard them too. They both sound pretty determined.

MILTON

(chuckles) Yeah. (Beat) What's wrong?

DIANE

You know what? Forget this. Maybe I can find another...

MILTON

No-no, don't go there! I can't promise you I'll be a good father, but I'll try. Really, I will.

DIANE

Well, if it's any consolation, I'm not so great, myself.

MILTON

(teasingly) What?! What was that? You're not so great yourself?

Just about this time, they start to come close to each other as if to kiss.

MILTON cont'd

Poor kid. He's got you as his mother.

DIANE

And you as his dad.

Suddenly, they begin to realize what they're about to do and quickly avoid contact.

MILTON and DIANE

How about that coffee?

DIANE

Good idea. Oh and by the way. Before we start talking about what plan we can work out?... I don't want you to think that there is any remote possibility of me being in love with you.

MILTON

Ha! I was thinking the same thing.

DIANE

What's important is that he has our love.

MILTON

And a family.

DIANE

Unconditionally.

MILTON

Without a doubt.

DIANE

Agreed.

Perfect.

MILTON

I'll let the court clerk know we're leaving.

DIANE

I'll be right there.

MILTON

Milton begins to pick up the cards, until he addresses Diane as she opens the door.

Diane?... (she stops and turns) I'd like our son to carry my name.

MILTON

(smirks) Okay. But it'll cost you.

DIANE

She walks out. Milton, catching on to her tease, smiles. Blackout.

End of Play

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