

“THE STARTER”

Micki Boden
© 2020
mickiboden@gmail.com

CHARACTERS:

THEO: Early 40s. Cynical with a goofy side.

PAM: Late 30s. A little skittish and condescending.

SETTING: Early evening. A studio apartment. Living room couch just a stone's throw from the kitchen. Visible trash can next to the kitchen counter. A door.

(THEO is sitting on the couch, thumbing through a magazine. On the other side of the door is thud.)

PAM: *(offstage)* H-hello? Theo? Can you let me in?

THEO: Door's unlocked.

PAM: That's nice, I just don't have a free hand.

THEO: Ok, coming. *(Doesn't, flips to the next page)*

PAM: Please? Thee-oh!

THEO: Yes yes, just a sec...

(Door swings open. In walks PAM, struggling to get in. She's holding multiple shopping bags. Theo sits back down.)

PAM: Hey. Hi, I went to the store, remember?

THEO: Yeah.

PAM: We agreed today was when we would stock up.

THEO: Thanks. I'll go next time.

PAM: No need. You leave the shopping to me. I got a lot of great stuff. The essentials – pasta, rice, cookies, butter –

THEO: Did you get any tomatoes?

PAM: No, why would I get tomatoes? We already have pasta sauce.

THEO: Oh.

PAM: And pizza sauce.

THEO: Ok.

PAM: I mean, why would we need an actual tomato? It'll just spoil before we eat it.

THEO: Point taken.

PAM: I got pepperoni. Isn't that exciting?

THEO: Sure. Do you need help getting this stuff put away?

PAM: *(Taken aback)* No no, you don't need to touch. You can stay over there and keep your distance. I've got it.

THEO: You look like you're about to drop everything. Isn't it heavy?

PAM: It IS heavy, which is why I'd appreciate you ending this line of questioning and letting me get this stuff tucked away safely.

THEO: *(Sigh)* Ok.

(PAM goes to the kitchen, rummages around the countertop.)

PAM: Theo?

THEO: Present.

PAM: THEO?!

THEO: Yes, what's wrong?

PAM: Where's the sourdough starter?

THEO: The what?

PAM: The sourdough starter. I just made it a few days ago. It was in a mason jar, right over here.

THEO: Oh, that goopy jar? I tossed it.

PAM: What do you mean you TOSSED it?

THEO: It didn't look like it was safe to leave raw dough out. Seemed like it belonged in the trash.

PAM: (*Frustrated*) That wasn't dough, I've been working hard on that starter so we could have bread.

THEO: You were just at the store, why didn't you *buy* bread?

PAM: Because, I wanted to *make* bread! Everyone is making bread.

THEO: A couple months ago you wouldn't touch a carb.

PAM: Things have changed. Now I love bread.

(*Theo's stomach growls. He touches it.*)

PAM: I guess I'm not the only one.

THEO: Ok, so I tossed your starter. No biggie. Why don't we make a new one?

PAM: We can't make a new one.

THEO: Hey, if it's hard, I can help –

PAM: It's not that. I used the last of the flour and yeast. I don't have any more.

THEO: Can you use something else?

PAM: No, it's a little more complicated than that. When did you toss it out?

THEO: Oh I don't know. The days blend together. I think...yesterday.

PAM: Why didn't you tell me before I went shopping?

THEO: How about this? You finish putting this stuff away, rest up... While you're doing that, I can run back out to the store. I can get more groceries, including things for your starter.

PAM: It's not that simple.

THEO: What do you mean? They won't know.

PAM: They will. I was scanned and checked before I went into the store, and they checked me again before I left.

THEO: Maybe I can try to reason with them.

PAM: Oh come on. You know there's no reasoning with them.

THEO: It's a special circum—

PAM: No it isn't. The rules are very specific.

THEO: As I was saying. This is a special circumstance. You bought nothing but carbs, yet we somehow don't have bread. Anyone would understand. We can't survive like that.

PAM: You can't just go back into the Living Realm. As *I* was saying, the rules were explicit that we can only go to the store once every 28 days. It's a very expensive experiment to even open the portal!

THEO: They should've checked your shopping bags on the way out. I don't know how we're gonna make it until the next trip.

(Pam rummages through her purse, pulls out a new pack of birth control pills.)

THEO: What are you doing?

PAM: Birth control.

THEO: Yeah I can see that, but why right now?

PAM: Well, two reasons. One, this helps me keep track of what day it is. See? *(Pops out the first pill in the pack, tacks on the day of week sticker.)* Wednesday.

THEO: Congratulations.

PAM: And two. I don't know what happens if I give birth down here. They are reviewing our case to see if we can come back to life. It could be a week. It could be a month. It could be never.

THEO: I'm sure they'd let us keep a kid. Or send them out of here, run the course of their life...

PAM: I don't think they want to deal with the paperwork. How do you put that a kid has two dead parents on the birth certificate?

THEO: I still can't make sense of this...place. *(He stands, paces)* We're still us, Pam. *(Knocks on the ceiling)* There's just six feet between us and where we used to be. You'd think we could just crawl out next time someone digs a hole deep enough.

PAM: Those kids that moved in our house, they were just a few inches away from digging a deep enough hole. I wonder if they're going to try again to dig to the other side of the world.

THEO: Probably, but even if they do, who knows what would happen? There's rules and procedures and every inch we move is closely monitored. *(Sits.)* Sometimes I like to pretend it isn't, and get caught up in the fantasy of normal life. We just have to wait.

PAM: Believe me, I know the feeling.

(She sits next to him on the couch. They both start scrolling on their phones.)

THEO: Huh. *(shows his screen to her)* Looks like the Billetts also made that sourdough starter stuff, that loaf is beautiful. I'll bet *their* bread tastes great.

PAM: Would you stop that? It's so cruel that we still have to monitor our accounts while we wait for their decision. All our Facebook does is remind us of what we don't have.

THEO: Like bread.

PAM: Yes, like bread.

(They put their phones down. A beat, then a loud squishing sound comes from the kitchen trash can.)

PAM: What was that?

THEO: No idea. I've never heard anything like that before.

(Something in the can starts rattling.)

PAM: Ok, that's scary. Can you take a look?

THEO: Alright. *(Stands.)*

PAM: Wait. *(She gets up, grabs a kitchen knife)* Just in case.

(Theo takes the knife, approaches the trash can. He tips it over, they both jump back.)

THEO: What the fuck is that?

(A beige blob starts squirming on the floor. Then it lets out a sticky-sounding cry. He bends down and pokes it, but holds the knife firmly in his other hand.)

THEO: I don't have a clue. I'm gonna kill it, just to be safe.

PAM: NO! Don't you see what it is?

THEO: Uh...no. Clearly.

PAM: It's a baby.

THEO: That doesn't make any sense.

(The blob coos.)

PAM: Listen to it. Those are baby sounds. I don't know how it could've ended up here, unless...

THEO: Unless what?

PAM: That must be the sourdough starter. Oh, it did work! It did stay alive!

THEO: This is some weird shit. Are you sure I shouldn't kill it?

PAM: I'm sure. Let me take that knife away *(she does)* and give our little sourdough a look. *(She picks it up)* Oh it's precious! Can you grab me a towel?

(He does, still skeptical. He hands it off and she swaddles the starter baby.)

PAM: Oh it's *perfect!* You know, for us.

THEO: I guess I can get on board.

(The starter cries.)

THEO: *(joking)* Sounds like the baby is hungry, you'd better nurse it.

(She instinctually holds the baby close to her chest and starts feeding. The crying stops.)

THEO: Wow. It really is a baby.

PAM: This is perfect. We never got a chance to try when we were up there.

(She starts bouncing the baby, curls up on the couch.)

THEO: We could be done with all of this soon. They said the accident was unplanned and they were trying to fix our death happening completely off schedule. The decision could be in a day.

PAM: Or a week. Or a month. Or never.

THEO: Maybe this isn't so bad after all. We just have to wait.

(He goes and sits next to her.)

THEO: Best of all, if we get hungry we can always bake the little guy. *(Leans in toward the baby)* Oh you would taste so good as a piece of toast, wouldn't you?

(Pam looks horrified.)

THEO: I'm kidding.

(He snuggles close to her and they both look at the baby. Just overhead, rubble starts falling and shovel blades dip into view. A child's voice, unseen, yells from above, "Hey, what's down there?")

END.