

"Brood"

by  
Bryan Howell

Bryan Howell  
7545 21st Ave. NE  
Seattle, WA 98115  
(206) 409-0775  
bryanhowell@yahoo.com

BLACK.

LIZZY (O.S.)  
(whispered lullaby)  
Hush little baby,  
Don't say a word.  
Momma's gonna buy you a  
mockingbird.

FADE IN:

INT. OSWALT CABIN - BRIGHT DAY

A single-room country home. Solid but worn. Austere. Kitchen, table, bed. Toilet in its own closet.

Lizzy Oswald, 28, sits on the edge of a bed, rocking her pregnant belly. Pretty once, now a bruise of a woman. Homespun dress, bare feet, hair like dry grass.

As she rocks she pleads her lullaby. Just loud enough for her belly to hear.

LIZZY  
And if that mockingbird  
don't sing,  
Momma's gonna buy you a  
diamond ring.

The front door slams open. Jonathan Oswald, 37, back from hunting. Heavy. Makes the whole room feel heavy.

Lizzy bites down, goes still. And don't think he doesn't notice.

JONATHAN  
You were singing.

LIZZY  
No.

JONATHAN  
Singing one of your hexes.

LIZZY  
I wasn't.

JONATHAN  
Think I'm stupid?

Lizzy shakes her head. She starts rocking again. Rocking her belly, rocking herself.

JONATHAN  
Gonna shit out another girl? That  
it?

Lizzy shakes her head. Jonathan clumps inside, slams the door behind him. Hangs his coat, his rifle.

JONATHAN  
Always room in the yard for another  
girl.

He looms over to her, stares her down. Not that it takes much. She just rocks, and rocks, and stares into the sawdust.

JONATHAN  
Tuck her in with the other five.

He watches her, waits. And watches. And waits. Nothing.

Fine, then. He moves to the sink to clean up. When his back is to her...

LIZZY  
(mouse whisper)  
Six.

He hears her. Goddamnit he does. He turns, swoops in.

JONATHAN  
(furious)  
What did you say?

LIZZY  
(oh no)  
I--

He grabs her neck like a rattle.

JONATHAN  
(shaking her)  
Think I can't count, whore? Six?  
Six, huh? Six?

He throws her, neck-first over the bed, into the wall. Her arms never leave her belly.

Jonathan stands, watching her, breathing hate and fire. All he wants is an excuse.

But she stays crumpled like he left her, eyes closed. Waits him out.

JONATHAN  
Dinner's on the porch. I'm gonna be  
hungry in an hour.

She listens to him clomp away from the bed. Takes a deep  
breath. Another. Opens her eyes.

FADE TO:

INT. OSWALT CABIN - NIGHT

Lizzy and Jonathan sit at a hand-carved dinner table in the  
cabin kitchen. Jonathan chews and watches. Lizzy picks  
through her food, eyes down.

JONATHAN  
Eat more meat.

Lizzy nods, mechanical. She forks a chunk of squirrel, lifts  
it to her mouth. Chews. Swallows.

JONATHAN  
You don't want him to be strong?

Lizzy spears another bite. Her belly doesn't want it, but she  
chokes it down.

JONATHAN  
That's it, isn't it? Don't even  
want him to live, do you?

Her fork slows, just a breath, on the way to her plate. But  
he sees it. He always sees it. She keeps eating.

JONATHAN  
You've had enough.

She stops.

JONATHAN  
Go to bed.

She gets up, eyes still down. Moves across the cabin, toward  
the bed.

JONATHAN  
No excuses tonight, when I come in.  
I had a long day.

He keeps eating, like a pack of dogs.

FADE TO:

INT. OSWALT CABIN - MORNING

Lizzy is kneading bread, awkward, all belly. By the door, Jonathan pulls on his jacket. Takes his rifle down. He's whistling -- Mr. Hyde today.

JONATHAN  
(re:bread)  
That gonna be ready when I get  
back?

Lizzy nods, trying to be bright.

JONATHAN  
Well that's good. Otherwise--

He lowers the rifle, hip shot, aimed right at her belly. Pulls the trigger.

CLICK! She jumps.

JONATHAN  
Ha ha! You always fall for that!

She smiles. Doesn't cry at all. Not even a little.

JONATHAN  
Be back soon, honeypot.  
(suddenly serious)  
You stay inside, all right?

She nods. He smiles, and he's out the door.

She goes back to kneading. Her hands are shaking.

FADE TO:

LATER

Lizzy paces by the front window. Checks it. She's waited long enough. Maybe a little longer. Checks the window again.

She goes to the door, hand on knob. Deep breath. Opens the door. A crack. Closes it. Opens it. She's through.

EXT. OSWALT CABIN - CONTINUOUS

She's walking though the yard in tough bare feet. Weeds and scrawny vegetable patches, and six small mounds, if you knew to look for them. She doesn't stop or look.

EXT. SURROUNDING HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

She walks. Into the thicket on the edge of the woods. She knows the way. Just up ahead.

A bush. Bright, smooth red berries. Not even birds eat these.

She reaches, cradles one berry in her fingertips. She plucks it. It seeps like a pricked finger.

She eats it. Winces. She picks another, and another. She eats them, swallowing against instinct.

She rakes off fistfuls, eats them. More. More.

CUT TO:

INT. OSWALT CABIN - LATER

Lizzy stumbles through the door of the cabin, arms on her belly, in agony. She lurches from doorjam to table, table to bed, bed to doorway of the toilet.

She crawls to the toilet, crying, fighting back heaves. She barely makes it to the bowl. She vomits, body sobbing.

LIZZY

(weak)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. God please.

It's not over. She vomits again. It goes on, and on.

FADE TO:

LATER

Lizzy lies on the floor of the cabin. Her mouth is crusted red. A halo of dried vomit on the floor.

She tries to sit up. So weak. Room's spinning. But something's wrong. Something else.

The room is smoky. The oven. The bread.

She lurches to her feet, stumbles back down. Her stomach jolts with pain. She fights up again. Feet steadier. Around the corner, toward the smoking oven.

Jonathan sits at the table, waiting for her. He gets up, eyes full of murder.

She tries to back away. Impossible. She's a newborn deer.

He lunges, backhands her across the face. She falls onto the bed. She tries to struggle, get her hands up. He brushes them aside. Grabs one, pins it over her head.

He ties her hand to the post. Grabs the other, knots it to the other corner.

She kicks, thrashes, begs, pleads. He stands, watching her for a moment. He coils and smashes her face again--

CUT TO: BLACK

BLACK

A ghostly woman's voice in a pitch-black dream, chanting Lizzy's lullaby.

VOICE

Hush little baby,  
Don't say a word.  
Momma's gonna buy you a  
mockingbird.

CUT TO:

INT. OSWALT CABIN - NIGHT

Lizzy, still tied down, wakes and cries out in pain. The baby is coming.

A series of moments blur together:

- Lizzy screaming, struggling against her ropes.
- Jonathan's hands with a towel, a bowl of steaming water.
- Lizzy writhing, kicking at bloodied sheets.
- Jonathan's hand, setting a knife on the towel.
- Lizzy's face, begging Jonathan, begging God.
- Jonathan sitting next to the bed, impassive. Watching.

The moment. Lizzy bears down, alone next to her husband, pushing. Screaming. Again.

Jonathan stands. He watches the baby emerge. Awe and revulsion.

Lizzy bears her teeth. One more push. One... more... push.

Lizzy collapses, crying, still bound. She can't even see the baby over her own body.

JONATHAN  
(horrified)  
Jesus Lord God of Mercy.

The baby hasn't cried yet. Lizzy struggles to lift her head to see over her own body.

From her face, we know she sees it. Thank god we can't.

The baby cries. The sound is inhuman -- like three discordant voices, all at once.

Jonathan steps back. He looks around, sees the towel, fumbles it, knocks scalding water over himself. Doesn't even notice. The baby keeps crying, horribly.

Jonathan grasps at the towel with numb hands, covers the baby, trying not to touch it. Picks the knife off the floor.

LIZZY  
(pleading)  
Please.

He jumps, brandishes the knife at her. He forgot she was there.

He recovers, grabs the umbilical cord, cuts it.

He gathers up the towel-wrapped baby, holds it like a sack of garbage. It's still crying.

Lizzy strains against the ropes.

LIZZY  
No! Please, Jonathan. It's a son!  
It's a son!

Jonathan looks at her, uncomprehending. He staggers toward the door, grabs a shovel from the corner, and stumbles out into the night. The door stays open a crack behind him.

From the door, we stay looking in on Lizzy. She's crying, desperate to stop what she knows is happening outside. She gets one hand free. But the other knot won't give.

She can hear the baby crying outside. She can hear Jonathan grunt, and the sickening impact of a swung shovel.

LIZZY  
(screaming)  
No!



The crying gets louder, higher. Another grunt and swing, even harder. Lizzy is frantic, but cannot break free.

A crescendo as a third blow lands. The crying ends sharply, but on a different note. Almost an animal growl.

Silence.

Lizzy listens. She struggles feebly against the last knot. Doesn't matter anymore. She's done. Beaten. The silence stretches on.

We can't see the door open, but Lizzy can. And she sees something, low, entering. Her eyes widen. An uncertain alloy of horror and love.

LIZZY  
(cooing)  
Hello. Hello there.

We hear the baby's same three discordant voices again, but cooing. Cooing at the sight of its mother as we

FADE TO BLACK.