

WORDS FAIL ME

By Barbara Bellman
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Barbara Bellman
1420 Locust Street, 31K
Philadelphia, PA 19102
301-233-8000
bellman.barbara@gmail.com

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Scene opens on DELLA, a married, middle-aged mother as she enters a cabin carrying her computer, suitcase, books, and a cooler of snacks.

As she juggles to put her things down on the table, her cell phone rings. The ringtone is "Suspense." DELLA juggles from pocket to pocket to retrieve the phone and after 4 rings she finds it before it goes to voicemail. She talks as she sets things on the desk.

DELLA

Oh, hi hon. God . . .I've gotta change this ringtone. (Listens, laughs) Yeah. Sounds like something from the Twilight Zone. What was I *thinking*? (Listens) Yeah, just got here. (Listens) No . . .no traffic at all.

Pauses, looks around the room.

I hope so. As I said, I just walked in.

Looks around for electrical outlet. Pulls out her adaptor.

Yeah, I see one. Um hum . . .it'll reach. If not, I'll move the table.

DELLA lifts the corner of the table to see if she can move it.

Honey . . .I'll be fine. Really! I'm fine. Stop worrying! I'll call you later. (Listens) Don't forget to feed the cat. Yeah. I know. She comes when it suits her. But still, don't forget to feed her or she'll make you pay! (Listens, laughs) I know. And I won't be there to clean it up if she does! You're on your own! (Listens) OK. I love you. Bye.

DELLA sets phone down. Adjusts the table to be closer to the outlets. Pulls out her laptop and plugs it in. Arranges the books next to the computer. Opens the cooler and pulls out a bottle of water, drinks. Sits down at the computer, opens it up and stares, poised and ready to write.

Phone rings.

What is it now? (Listens) It's in the lower left shelf in the pantry. Next to the crackers. (Listens) Uh . . .no. I *don't* know why it's there. Can we rearrange the pantry when I get back? I'll only be gone a week! Surely you can forage through the pantry yourself. (Listens) Of *course* you'll miss me. I'll miss you too, but it's only a week. And the week starts now. I'm hanging up. Feed the cat.

DELLA sets phone down. Tries to focus again on the screen. Starts to type after a few moments. Types for about 20 seconds when the phone rings again. She answers, annoyed.

Somebody better be *dying*! (Listens) You called me for *that*? (Listens) I . . .don't . . .*CARE!* Doesn't *matter!* Look . . .honey. We made a deal. One week is all I want. It's all I *need*. Just one week. No distractions. No responsibilities. NO CALLS! You *promised!*

DELLA vamps like Greta Garbo.

I *want* to be alone . . . (Listens) If you keep calling, I'm going to turn the phone off altogether. (Listens) I *mean* it. (Pause) Say goodnight Gracie. (Listens) I love you too.

DELLA sets phone down. Stares at the computer screen. Stretches. Sips from her water bottle. Refocuses and begins to type for another minute. Stops. Reads aloud to herself.

"KILL HER," she screamed.

DELLA sighs and shakes her head. Talks to herself as she deletes the opening of her draft.

Delete . . .delete . . .delete . . .delete . . .

DELLA stares at computer, then she types again, this time she's really going. She's focused, and the keys just tap away. For about 30 seconds, this is all we hear. Then in the middle of her concentration, the phone rings again, startling her. She stares at the phone, resolving to not answer it. It rings until it goes into voicemail. Just as she resumes writing, the phone rings again. This time she answers, and is very frustrated.

This isn't funny. (Listens) Alright . . .alright. I can't do anything from here. Either you handle it, or it'll have to wait. It's not life or death if she doesn't get the application in this week. (Listens) Why don't you get her started and I'll edit it when I return? (Listens) It's only a week, for crissakes! Are you *helpless*? (Listens) I've been after

her for a month to write these letters and she picks *now* to panic? We've still got three weeks before they're due. (Listens) No. I'm not going to get into this now. This is MY time. We agreed on it. I didn't leave any of you in the lurch. The freezer's full of meals . . .labeled for every day so you won't go hungry. Laundry's all done. Carpools have all been arranged and the kid's schedule for the week is on the refrigerator. The lawn's been mowed. (Pause) Even the car's been serviced . . .so LEAVE ME ALONE! All I asked for is ONE WEEK. ONE WEEK to be alone to write, to think, to finally have uninterrupted time to work on this story. ONE WEEK won't kill you to be on your own. Seven days is all I want and I've not been here for an hour and this is the fourth time you've called. Enough already! (Listens) I'm sorry. I know you're worried about me being here alone. But I'm fine. I'm just fine. (Listens) John . . .JOHN! *Stop!* This is ridiculous. If you don't stop calling, I'm going to toss this phone out the window. I am. You'll see. (Listens) Don't temp me. (Listens) This is me, now . . .saying goodbye. Say goodnight Gracie. (Listens) What? Is *that* what you think? I can't believe you'd *say* that. You know how much this means to me . . .to finally realize I have a voice of my own . . .something to say . . .and yes . . .some talent for saying it . . .and all I ask for is a little respect to allow me the luxury . . .yes . . .LUXURY of time to do something that's important for ME! (Listens) Selfish? How is this selfish? You go on fishing trips with your buddies and that's not selfish? (Listens) Abandoned? Since when do YOU feel abandoned? (Listens) OK. I get it. Thanks a lot. Well, I'm not listening anymore. (Holds finger to her available ear) La . . .la . . .la . . .la . . . Say goodnight Gracie. (Taps off)

Furious, DELLA paces the room a bit. She's beyond frustrated, and picks up the phone as if to call John back but instead, she throws the phone out the door.

DELLA starts to sit down but is seized with a terrible headache. She holds her head, and feels like she is going to vomit. The headache gets worse, and her knees begin to buckle. She slips to the floor, clutching her head until her arm falls limply at her side. She tries to move, but her right side is paralyzed. She tries to call for help, but words don't come out . . .just inarticulate sounds and grunts.

UNGH . . .UNGHHHH . . .UNGHHHH . . .HEHHHHHHH . . . HEHHHHHHH! HEHHHHHHH!

DELLA'S eyes dart frantically to scoot herself to the door, but she can't reach the doorknob.

Her phone rings and rings and rings as she tries to call for help.

HEHHHHHHHHH . . . HEHHHHHHHHH!

Knock on door. Someone tries the door.

NEIGHBOR

Hello? Anyone here? I found a phone out here and wondered if it was . . .

DELLA

HEHHHHHHHHH . . . HEHHHHHHHHH!

NEIGHBOR sees Della on the floor and pushes the door open. He kneels down to help her and still has the ringing phone in his hand.

HEHHHHHHHHH . . . HEHHHHHHHHH!

NEIGHBOR

Hey. Take it easy. It's OK. I live next door and heard this . . .

Looks around, realizes he's got a ringing phone in his hand. Answers it.

(To DELLA)

Hang on.

(Into phone)

Hello? (Listens) Hey . . .HEY! Wait up! I just found this woman . . .she can't talk. I mean . . .she's trying, but I can't understand her. (Pause) I think she's had a stroke. (Listens) Yeah, this phone was ringing . . .outside. (Pause) I didn't know who's phone it was. I just picked it up. (Listens) I'm not sure.

Turns to DELLA and makes a grimace face and waves.

Lady, can you smile? (No reaction) No? (Pause) How about a wave? A little wave? Huh? (Into phone) No smiling. No waving. (Listens, then back to DELLA) Can you stick out your tongue? Say your name? (Pause, waits for response) No. Nothing. (Listens) OK. I'm not going anywhere. (Listens) It's the yellow cabin off Route 12. Fourth house in from the road. I've got a blue truck next door. It's easy to find. (Listens) Yeah, no problem. Hey it's nothing. I know . . .I know. What can you say? (Listens) Yeah. Words fail me too.

END OF SCENE