

THE SWAN by Elizabeth Egloff

In this black comedy fantasy, a much-married woman, DORA, in her thirties, finds a swan in her Nebraska home. The swan has assumed the form of a man named "Bill." Dora becomes his protector, teacher and moral guide. Here, she explains to him about modern, human life—she's playing cassettes in a boom box.

SCENE: Dora's house.

TIME: The present.

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DORA: Clothes, on the other hand, are very important. Duane, the first time I met Duane, he was wearing a French suit, Italian shoes, and a Brazilian crocodile coat. Duane had more clothes than anybody I ever met. Then he got a job on an oil rig, and asked me to marry him. I'll never forget the day I waved him off at the pier. I was wearing a red tulle dress, six-inch yellow heels, and a little white pillbox hat. I couldn't stop crying for a month. *(She stops, and looks at him.)* That looks much nicer. You need a tie. There. On the floor. You only get one chance to make a first impression. *(He hands her the tie. She takes it and starts to tie it around his neck.)*

You ever been married, Bill? I'm a great supporter of marriage. I don't think people are meant to be alone. I don't think I am. Strange things happen to me when I'm alone. Dangerous things. Like once I was in bed smoking a cigarette. And I'm lying there and I look up and I see a man standing in the door. He just walked into the house. He just opened the door and walked right into my house ... And he's covered with leaves and there's grass in his hair and mud on his shoes. And he looks so sad and he looks so much like ^{Gerry} only that was before I'd ever met Gerry so how could he BUT there's something about him there's something in him that's warm that's comfortable someplace I could ease my aching heart and God: I looked at this person, I looked at this total stranger and I thought Yes you're right love is the only thing that matters if only I could get me some I could laugh again I could eat again I could belong to the world again, and just as I'm about to say Yes, you're him You're the one, my cigarette is burning my fingers and I turn to put it out, and by the time I look back, he's gone. Disappeared. Evanesced. I never saw him again. It's always the way, isn't it? Some people say I shouldn't marry so many, but I have to. They keep disappearing on me.

Franklin always said, he said, Dora if you can't love yourself, then you can't love anyone. I said, but Franklin ... I love you ... Franklin was much too delicate for someone of my affections. If he hadn't left, I probably would have destroyed him altogether.

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I don't think men are born on this planet. I think men are born on the planet Pluto and they have them molecularly disassembled and radared to the earth. Which is why. Which is why they are so, so, you have to take care of them in a very special way because they are foreign bodies being introduced to the system. And which is both why I love them and why I don't understand them whatever they're talking about.

I remember I met Gerry, you would think it was the day after he'd been radared to the earth. There was something about Gerry. Something tender, something baby, like here was a man who needed more time to adapt to the eco-system. Gerry was always talking to himself: What is love and why do we do it? The day after we got married. H went out in the woods and shot himself. The whole thing didn't exactly inspire my confidence.

Duane inspired my confidence, or what was left of it. Duane breathed life into a millimeter of myself, the piece of shrapnel I have come to regard as my heart. I took one look at Duane and said, here's a man he doesn't ask questions, and he doesn't own a gun. Perfect, I thought, how could I go wrong? So I told him I loved him, and I loved myself. Duane said, how can you love yourself, if you don't love the world? Love the world, I said? I can hardly get out of bed. *(Beat)* Two days later, he ran off. I was joking.