

Wedding Surprise

by

Scott Lummer

2788 Winberrie Knolls
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

415-819-7588

scottlummer@gmail.com

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Cast:

NYLA – Female, 32

TIM – Male, 33

PHOTO BOOTH VOICE – (voice only)

Setting:

Present day, an abandoned shopping mall. There is a retail store in the right 2/3 of the stage. A wall with a door separates it from the mall. In the store, there is a counter so that the audience can't see what's underneath. In the mall, outside the store, is a photo booth.

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At rise, audience sees an abandoned mall. Nyla enters quickly, followed by Tim.

TIM

Laughing

I never knew you were so adventurous.

NYLA

I told you, bae. I'm a woman full of surprises.

TIM

Breaking into an abandoned mall?

NYLA

I wanted to show you something. Plus, I had to get away from our families.

TIM

They're not so bad. They're all excited about Saturday. Hell, **I'M** excited about Saturday. We've been planning this for ages.

NYLA

Only three years and four cancellations. Your family might not be bad, but my dad keeps wanting to rehearse the father-daughter dance as if he's in a reality competition.

TIM

It's good to be away from all of them for a few hours. I don't know how much more advice I can take.

NYLA

I'm glad they told you to do whatever your wife says.

TIM

Cool! An old-fashioned photo booth!

NYLA

Yeah. They put that in right before I finished working here.

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TIM

You used to work in the mall?

NYLA

That's why I brought you here. I wanted to show you --

TIM

Let's get some pics.

Presses button on side of booth.

PHOTO BOOTH VOICE

Please deposit 25 cents or enter code on the keypad.

TIM

25 cents. Not even a quarter costs 25 cents now. Why so cheap?

NYLA

I don't know – like I said, it wasn't here for most of the time I was –

TIM

Got a quarter?

NYLA

Maybe later. I want to show you something first.

TIM

What?

NYLA

It's in here.

Types code into keypad on door. Bends over to press an eye against a retinal scan reader. Opens door. She and Tim enter.

TIM

You can get in with a retinal scan?

NYLA

Yep, this is where I used to work.

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TIM

What kind of store needs a retinal scanner to enter? Wait a minute, angled racks, frames on the walls, bright colors. Was this a --

NYLA

That's right, this used to be a Blockbuster store.

TIM

You were a blockbusterer?

NYLA

For six years – why do you think the bride maids' dresses are blue and yellow?

TIM

Why didn't you tell me before?

NYLA

Cause every time I tell someone, they complain about how their favorite movie was always unavailable. How many copies of the Notebook can we keep in stock? There are still some DVDs in the back. We can watch some later.

TIM

But still – we shouldn't have any secrets. We told each other we wouldn't --

NYLA

You were on a need-to-know basis -- for several reasons.

TIM

Need-to-know? For a blockbuster?

NYLA

Yes ... Remember when, right after we were engaged, those FBI agents interviewed you.

TIM

You said it was because of a government grant you had applied for.

NYLA

That wasn't exactly true. But the good news is, you passed the background check.

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TIM

And I signed the secrecy form. A bit of overkill for your research into sociological causes of neuro atypical traits.

NYLA

That wasn't the reason. That's why a retinal scan is needed.

TIM

Bae, I'm really confused. Why would the FBI care that you once worked for a video store?

NYLA

Because, after the company went bankrupt, the government hired many of us former managers to work for them.

Crosses to counter.

TIM

What? I don't get --

NYLA

That's why I needed to show you. Stand back.

Bends facing the audience, punches in a code to something under the counter. Sound of a metal door opening. Light illuminates Tim and Nyla from under the counter.

TIM

What ... what is that?

NYLA

It's a MMTND

TIM

An MMT --

NYLA

Miniature Mobile Thermonuclear Device

TIM

Bae, you have a bizarre sense of humor.

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NYLA

I'm not joking. Remember that article in the Atlantic about a secret government project to have a broad dispersion of WMD in case a foreign power was able to neutralize our traditional weapons.

TIM

I can't say that I do.

NYLA

Of course not – no one actually reads the Atlantic. Anyway, there was an article, and it was mostly true.

TIM

You're saying that's a nuclear bomb ... sitting here ... in this empty Blockbuster store.

NYLA

Not just here – thousands of them across the country.

TIM

Why would --

NYLA

Think about it. Very few video stores have been repurposed for anything else. So if you wanted to have a clandestine weapons program, hiding them in Blockbusters is foolproof.

TIM

You're the person in charge of this location?

NYLA

Yep, all me.

TIM

What if you're unavailable?

NYLA

Senior military members have virtual and hardwired overrides with some access point nearby.

TIM

But from a daily responsibility perspective, you're in control of the bomb?

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NYLA

Don't call it a bomb. Use a code name. Let's call it "the package."

TIM

I'm not planning on frequent discussions about this – in fact, I don't want any involvement at all.

NYLA

We might have to – in case of an emergency.

TIM

Nyla, I'm not comfortable with this being a part of my life.

NYLA

I don't see what the big deal is. Every once in a while I need to check up on things, run a test, make sure the system is operating. I, and my bosses, were hoping you could be trained as my backup.

TIM

I already have a job.

NYLA

It's not like a real job. Just every couple of weeks we need to spend a few hours here. It would be like a date.

TIM

Exciting date. Come to abandoned mall, stand in a closed food court and have imaginary over the counter Korean cuisine. Then off to the video store for a special showing of Pierce Brosnan in Mamma Mia. And for dessert – radiation poisoning from an old fission device.

NYLA

There's no leakage. The scientists worked on a zero-risk tolerance.

TIM

That's one thing that unites the world -- government scientists eliminating the possibility of any nuclear disaster. It's worked really well in the past.

NYLA

I figured you'd be surprised, but I didn't think you would be so negative.

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TIM

My family warned me about lots of possibilities, but I was unprepared that in two days I'd be marrying Dr. Strangelove.

NYLA

So now we're down to insults. Should I start a list of your various activities that I find objectionable? Your NFT collection. Describing every last detail of the airplane we're on. Telling your mother about all our conversations.

TIM

We said we wouldn't bring up our parents' eccentricities.

NYLA

They're not your mother's eccentricities – they're yours!

TIM

I put up with a lot too. Like your ... (*long pause*) we shouldn't be doing this. Bae, I'm confused, but I can see this is important to you. (*Crosses to Nyla*) Let's take some time to think about how to make this work. I'm sure we can figure something out.

NYLA

You know, I'm sure we can too.

TIM

Maybe you can go in the back and find a Die Hard sequel for us to watch tonight.

NYLA

Maybe we can simply skip the movie.

Closes container for bomb. Hugs Tim.

TIM

I like your idea better. Shall we.

Nyla and Tim exit the store. Nyla gets a quarter from her purse and hands it to Tim.

NYLA

Thank you for being so patient. Here you go.

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TIM

What's this for.

Nyla nods toward the booth. Tim smiles, drops a quarter into the booth. They both climb in. Three flashes happen while they are in there.

NYLA

After the first flash

Make this one a funny face.

TIM

After the second flash

This one lets be dead serious.

After the third flash. they both exit the booth and wait for the photos to come out.

PHOTO BOOTH VOICE

While you're waiting, you can guess one of the secret codes. You can win prizes, including credits for additional photos.

Tim starts pressing the keypad on the photo booth.

NYLA

What are you doing? We're not going to get a prize. The company that made these things is probably defunct.

TIM

We might get an extra photo session – no harm in trying.

Lights start glowing in the video store, and an alarm starts sounding.

PHOTO BOOTH VOICE

You have activated the automatic launch sequence for the Miniature Mobile Thermonuclear Device. You have 20 seconds to abort launch.

NYLA

What did you do?

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TIM

I was just guessing random numbers – I tried your birthday.

NYLA

You must have typed the manual override for the bomb.

TIM

I thought we were supposed to call it the package.

NYLA

Who cares what we call --

PHOTO BOOTH VOICE

10 seconds.

TIM

Do something!

NYLA

I have no idea what the abort code is.

Crosses to keypad, busily enters numbers.

PHOTO BOOTH VOICE

5 seconds.

TIM

What will happen?

NYLA

It's going to lift off, and like a tiny missile, head for somewhere in Russia.

TIM

This is going to start a world war.

They hold each other, staring at the video store.

Alarm stops, illumination from video store stops. Silence for five seconds

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PHOTO BOOTH VOICE

Our records show that you have accumulated excessive fees over the past 10 years – all account activity suspended until your account has been brought up to date. Launch sequence suspended.

Nyla and Tim continue to hold each other. Slowly release.

NYLA

Thank goodness Blockbuster's late fee policy remained part of the WMD program.

TIM

How sure are you about continuing your government service?

NYLA

Let's say I'm coming around to your point of view. Let's get out of here.

Begins to exit

TIM

Bae, don't forget our photos.

Picks up photos from booth, follows Nyla to exit

PHOTO BOOTH VOICE

Thank you for shopping at Blockbuster. We hope you enjoy your movies. Remember that rentals must be returned by noon tomorrow to avoid a nuclear apocalypse.

END OF PLAY