

Separate Loads

a dark comedy about choices, actions and options

by Jennie Webb

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Separate Loads

Characters:

A WOMAN DAUNTED BY OPTIONS

A MAN EXCITED BY OPPORTUNITIES

Setting:

A kitchen-dining-living room with adjacent laundry

Time:

Sometime after breakfast on a Saturday

Casting:

Characters are both well into their 20s or even 30s, even if they're not ready to be.

Dialogue:

— Indicates a character's dialogue is interrupted, by another character speaking, an event or a character abruptly shifting gears within a line of dialogue.

... Indicates a character is searching for words, does not complete a thought or leaves a line of dialogue open.

NOTE: There's a lot of license here for technical & design elements to be stylized.

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Synopsis:

A dark comedy about choices, actions and options, at the heart of *Separate Loads* is a couple contemplating an important decision. During a time in which America is connected—and divided—in very revealing ways, it becomes clear to one woman that *not* making a choice is a choice in itself.

Separate Loads

We see a small living area of a modern dwelling connected to a dining space, and a high counter behind which is a kitchen. There's a small washer and dryer somewhere we can't see. It's all very efficient. If not quite cozy. A large chair takes up a lot of space in the room. It's the kind a guy would pick out because it looks manly. Indeed, a man sits at a dining table—he's on a laptop. He's drinking coffee and really enjoying what's onscreen.

MAN:

Hah! Hey! Honey! Come here!

WOMAN:

(offstage) Why?

MAN:

Your sister is crazy!

WOMAN:

(offstage) Oh, that's not news!

We hear the faint sound of a clothes dryer as a woman enters, carrying a pile of freshly washed laundry; a bit like she's playing house, she's not quite sure what to do with it.

So... what's going on?

MAN:

She and Josh are having this huge fight.

WOMAN:

How'd you find that out?

She plops the clothes on the chair.

MAN:

On Facebook. They're fighting on Facebook.

WOMAN:

I thought she was still in jail.

MAN:

No, she got out days ago. He decided not to press charges; moved back in.

WOMAN:

You found this all out on Facebook?

MAN:

Yeah, here's a picture of his head. *(showing her his screen)* Only a few stitches, he was lucky. They both were!

WOMAN:

Oh, yeah.

She starts to fold laundry.

You need a table or something in by your washer and dryer.

MAN:

We can get one. But look: She posted this shot yesterday. "Daddy's home!" He's got the kids on his lap. With a big bottle of tequila.

WOMAN:

Nice! That is one happy family.

MAN:

You're just jealous 'cause she asked me to be her friend.

WOMAN:

Yes, that's it. I envy you her Facebook friendship. Hello! And what's this?

She holds up a bright red shirt, distinct from the other pale clothes.

MAN:

That's mine. You don't like it?

WOMAN:

It's... fine. *(indicating the pile of clothes)* But why was it in here? You have to keep things separate; colors all can't be in the same—

MAN:

(interrupting) I set it on cold. I always wash everything in cold.

WOMAN:

But you still can't put them in together; I had stuff in there, could be ruined!

He moves to the pile of clothes.

MAN:

Look! It's fine! Nothing's ruined, nothing... blurred.

WOMAN:

Bled.

MAN:

Bled. Nothing bled. Did it

WOMAN:

Not that I can tell.

MAN:

See? It's all good!

He gives her a kiss and returns to his screen.

WOMAN:

Yet.

MAN:

Is there any more coffee?

She leaves the laundry and goes behind the kitchen counter for the pot.

(looking at his computer screen) Okay. Great. I am loving this. This is so great.

WOMAN:

Me serving you coffee?

She refills his cup, maybe teasing him a bit.

MAN:

Well, of course that. Ha ha. Thank you. You make a mean cuppa' coffee.

WOMAN:

I do like your coffee maker.

MAN:

You're not having any?

WOMAN:

Can't stand the smell.

MAN:

Oh. Sorry. You feeling okay? You want me to get you something?

WOMAN:

No. *(indicating the computer screen)* I want to know what's so great.

She returns the coffee pot.

MAN:

Right. Okay, so the babysitter posts on Josh's wall, "I miss you soooooo much"—there are...seven o's—"but if you ensist"—spelled with an e—"to be with your wife I understand but I still love you and want to see you if you want to see me too..." five x's.

WOMAN:

This is the 18-year-old babysitter he had an affair with which is what started this whole thing? And if you can read that my sister can read it, too?

MAN:

Oh, she already read it! “Just try to get near my house; I’ll kick your skinny ass until there’s nothing left.”

WOMAN:

Man. Now you see why I’m so ambivalent about all of this? I mean, moving in with you, much less...

She comes from behind the counter with her hand on her stomach, which is now a bit more pronounced.

There’s a lot you don’t know about me. I apparently have these recessive trailer trash genes. I can’t be held responsible for whatever happens.

MAN:

Hey, I love your family! You’ve met my mine; so uptight, you can’t even— I’ll take yours, any day. So! Your sister and Josh are in this big fight—

WOMAN:

(interrupting) On Facebook.

MAN:

And I hope you don’t mind that I’m sharing it with all *my* Facebook friends.

WOMAN:

You are not!

MAN:

No. I’m not. But I am putting the pix on Instagram. Hashtag These Are My People.

WOMAN:

Ha ha ha. Jesus, I just hope she doesn’t hit him again. My mom can’t be flying out there and taking care of those kids; she’s getting too old for that shit.

MAN:

I’ll bet your mom’s a fantastic grandma. I can’t wait to meet her. Although...
(indicating the computer screen) She’s now my friend, too.

WOMAN:

Hint: Don’t use the “G” word around her. She’s reinvented herself as “Nana.”

MAN:

Nana?

WOMAN:

Like the dog from Peter Pan but I don’t think she’s actually made that connection.

She returns to the laundry.

MAN:

Oh! And you wanna know about the poll?

Short pause.

WOMAN:

Okay. About the poll...

MAN:

You're not going to believe the traffic the site's gotten. We got so many hits through Polldaddy the other night, my buddy said the server crashed. He was up for like 24 hours trying to put the all pieces back together.

WOMAN:

All the kings horses and all the king's men.

MAN:

What?

WOMAN:

Humpty Dumpty. Couldn't put Humpty together again.

MAN:

Anyway, it's been amazing. So much support, you know. It's like our little seed of an idea has grown and really engaged people. Who want to be part of something. I know you haven't been reading the comments lately...

WOMAN:

No, I have not.

MAN:

Well, after those hackers got in, the numbers tilted way to the "have an abortion" side. But since then it's been an outpouring of good, positive energy from people who are totally invested: "Should we have this baby?"

WOMAN:

Right.

MAN:

Right. I mean, sure, there are people who think the whole thing is fake, you know. Like "Keith" and "Amy" aren't real.

WOMAN:

Keith and Amy aren't real.

MAN:

Sure, but— We're using those names to protect ourselves precisely because this is all too real. People get that. That we're sharing the poll—welcoming votes and opinions and, yes, controversy—because whether to have this baby is not a decision we take lightly. And in today's complex and changing world, we can't fool ourselves into believing we can responsibly make it alone! We asked for help from our community and they've stepped up to the plate.

WOMAN:

Is that from your blog entry? Or, sorry, "Keith's"?

MAN:

It's good, huh? Should get a lot of action. People following the Twitter account are really after "Amy" to start blogging as well, so whenever you're up for it, babe. It could even go viral as we get closer to the deadline. But! I was thinking: The first trimester's only a few more weeks. What if we extended the deadline? It'd still be—

WOMAN:

(interrupting) No! I think we should take the site down.

Pause.

MAN:

What?

WOMAN:

I think it was a mistake. I think we should take it down.

MAN:

But it was your idea.

WOMAN:

It was not my idea.

MAN:

Well, it became our idea but you get the credit.

WOMAN:

Yeah, not something I—

MAN:

(interrupting) Really, though, I will never forget that moment. It's like an origin story, right? Over dinner, you looked at me, told me you were pregnant... we were both totally overwhelmed by what was ahead of us and you said, "We still live in a free country! Let's put it to a vote!"

WOMAN:

I'd had two glasses of wine.

MAN:

Two small glasses. I've been reading and that shouldn't be a problem.

WOMAN:

I'm serious. I think it should come down.

MAN:

But the longer we wait—

WOMAN:

(interrupting) I don't want to wait. I can't wait. I want it down now!

MAN:

Heeey, honey.

He moves to her and holds her.

WOMAN:

I'm sorry.

MAN:

I know. It's not you. It's your hormones talking.

WOMAN:

Fuck you.

She moves back into the laundry room.

MAN:

Whoa! Okay, then! But just because you're mad at me isn't a reason to abandon this whole thing. We've really got something going here. Something important!

The sound of the dryer has stopped.

WOMAN:

(offstage) And what is that? Just what important thing are you talking about?

We hear the dryer start up again and she comes back in carrying more clothes.

MAN:

What do you think? The poll! The vote!

WOMAN:

Oh! Because I thought the important thing here was this—

Pregnant pause, then she drops the clothes on the chair. It's now clear she's with child.

MAN:

What?

WOMAN:

I was going to say “this baby.” You’re rubbing off on me.

MAN:

And that’s a bad thing?

WOMAN:

But it’s like you’ve already decided. You want us to be a family.

MAN:

Yes! I’ve never said otherwise! I love you; I knew the minute I met you that’s what I wanted. But I totally get that there’s more that we need to consider.

WOMAN:

Like Polldaddy?

MAN:

Hey. What’s really going on here, sweetie?

WOMAN:

What’s going on is I want that site down! It is a joke. The poll, the blog, the tweets... This whole thing’s a joke. Me. You. (*looking at her stomach*) This. The whole reason this happened is I couldn’t decide whether I liked you or if we were even dating, and I’m suddenly the posterchild for choice? I think that’s hilarious!

MAN:

Okay...

WOMAN:

Because, truly, it’s not like I even have any sort of say in what’s happening right now. It’s my body, my completely unrecognizable body, that’s in charge, not me!

MAN:

Then we’ll take it down! It’s already sent a message! And if we’re ready to make the choice for ourselves...

WOMAN:

But I’m not ready. I may never be ready.

MAN:

Which was the reason we put the site up in the first place!

WOMAN:

I should not have let that happen. I mean, the more I think about it that was exactly the wrong thing to do. The wrong message to send. “America, you tell me what I can and can’t do with my own body.” Because I happen to live in a state where I have an option? What was I thinking? Or not thinking. Because here’s the cruelest joke of all: If don’t decide, if I don’t make a choice... that’s what decides the rest of my whole goddamn life and that’s not okay!

In frustration, she moves behind the chair and makes messy attempts at clothes folding..

MAN:

Honey! Relax! Don't worry; we still have time!

WOMAN:

Do we? Or have we already run out? One minute it's like "You're fine, you're you, you've worked so hard and now your life's your own" and then, *wham* everything you took for granted is about to be snatched away by people who have no idea what— They talk about responsibility but look at the kind of world they've created, that we'll be leaving to our— Ahhhhhh!

Her outburst is tears or anger or pain or probably all three.

MAN:

Okay. That is definitely your body sending a message. I'm getting you a glass of water.

He goes into the kitchen and she steps from behind the chair. She is now very pregnant.

WOMAN:

I don't want— I don't— I— Argh.

MAN:

Here. Sit down.

He hands her a glass and sets her in the chair, sweeping aside the folded clothes.

WOMAN:

Oh, god. I don't know. I don't know about anything. I feel like Alice in fucking Wonderland. I just don't know, anymore.

MAN:

Drink that.

She looks at the glass in her hand. He goes back to his computer.

Here's what'll happen. We'll take the weekend off. Decide about the site on Monday. In the meantime, my buddy did this search engine optimization thing and, oh! I put up these new graphics. I morphed photos of you and me and got this amazing baby picture. You wouldn't believe how cute. Our kid.

WOMAN:

Right. Curiouser and curiouser.

She sets down the glass.

MAN:

Hey! Here's a new post from your mom. Now the babysitter might go to jail. She tried to break into the house. And Josh took the kids. Crazy, huh? And get this: Your mom says, "I don't know anymore." Hah! She sounds just like you. Isn't that what you just said? "I don't know anymore?"

The woman stands.

WOMAN:

Turn that off. Will you please turn off your computer?

MAN:

Okay, but oh. No. It's two words. "I don't know any *more*."

The woman bends down to pick up a piece of once-folded clothing.

So I guess you're not your mom. Ha ha ha. Not yet, anyway!

WOMAN:

No. Not yet...

She holds up a white blouse; at its center is a large red splotch. And we hear the dryer, louder now, going round and round. And round.

End of Play