

Windows

BY
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“What would you have had me do?” she said to the man who was sitting in front of her. On the table between them was an ashtray with a lit cigarette in it.

You could have fucking offered me one, she thought. They always do on tv.

“You didn’t think of doing anything?” He hit it and put it back in the ashtray.

“I already told you what I thought of.” She took a deep breath and tried to really smell the smoke. Once a smoker, always a smoker, she thought.

She sighed loudly and looked out the long skinny thick window.

“You want one?” He picked up the pack and pointed it at her.

“I don’t smoke,” she said, still looking out the window. I have no sense of direction in here, she thought. What’s out that window? Is that where we parked? Or is it the back of the place? I see the high limb of a tree.

“Right. Listen. I’ll be back in a minute.” He got up from the table and left the room.

She grabbed the cigarette and took a deep drag. What? she said to herself. Another hard drag. Exhale. Fuck. Fuck you. This is fucked, that’s why. Inhale. I wonder when I’ll get my requisite phone calls? Who could I call? Exhale. Inhale.

She tamped the cigarette out in the tray and then fell back into the chair and exhaled one last time.

He came home early, around two p.m. She was reading. He just walked in because she’d left the door unlocked, which is something she normally did not do. He looked dejected, she thought.

“What’s wrong? What are you doing home?” She closed the book.

“Nothing. Just not feeling so great.”

“O.” She got up and followed him into the bedroom where he took off his work clothes and put on sweats. He told her he was

going to lie down a while and she said okay and gave him a sympathetic smile. She walked out and, after asking him if he needed anything and him telling her no, closed the bedroom door behind her. She went back to reading and then minutes later the sound.

She got up and walked to the door, opened it. He was there, in bed—sleeping, she assumed. She smelled just a hint of something like fireworks before closing the door. Shshsh, she said to herself, he's sleeping.

An hour and a half later she went in to wake him because he'd had enough sleep, she thought. Plus, if he gets up now, she thought, we'll still have almost two hours before one of us has to go get the baby from daycare, so we can spend some time together, just the two of us, talking, or just whatever.

She stood there watching him sleep for a minute or two. She loved to watch him sleep. Didn't like it when he got sad, though. She lay down next to him, on top of the covers. She turned his face to hers to kiss his lips, and that's when she saw a brown-red hole right in the middle of his forehead. She kissed him.

That's what she'd told them and they didn't believe her.

The man came back and he had another man with him. The first man sat in the same place and the new one, a black guy carrying a clipboard, sat at the head of the table. He put the clipboard down and lit a cigarette. Christ, she thought.

"My names Mr. Willister," said the new guy. "We're going to need to hear your story one more time, please, mam. Mrs. Kendall." He licked his lips. Dinner, she thought.

"One more time," she said.

"Yes, mam."

"A fourth time," she said.

"Yes, mam. A fourth time," said the man with the clipboard.

"It isn't going to get any better," she said.

"That's not why we want to hear it, mam. Now, please, one more time."

"You know what?" she said.

"What?" said the first guy, folding his arms over his chest.

"I'd like a cigarette, please."

The first guy opened his box and handed it to her. She grabbed

the whole pack, took one out, and lit it with the other guy's lighter. She took one drag and put it out.

"Are you ready now?" said the guy with the clipboard.

"No."

"When do you think you'll *be* ready?" said the first guy, blinking very slowly.

"Three is plenty," she said. "I won't say another fucking word if I don't feel like it."

"We're not against you, mam."

"Yes you are." She picked up the cigarette and relit it with a shaky hand. "This doesn't feel right."

"What doesn't feel right, mam?"

"Quit calling me mam. I'm not a fucking mam." She put the cigarette in the ashtray and the first guy put it out for her.

"Look. You're getting upset. We don't want you to get upset. Do you want some coffee or something?"

"That's just what I need, fucking coffee. What I want is for this fucking asshole to quit calling me mam... and I want to be treated like a normal person... and I don't want you two smoking in here... This is a no-smoking building."

"Okay," the first guy said.

The second guy put his cigarette out.

They sat for a while and did and said nothing.

She leaned back and put her hands in her lap, and held them.

"Can I ask you something?" said the second guy.

No answer.

"Did you know your husband was cheating on you?"

She glanced at him and then looked straight ahead, through the first guy's forehead. "You're an idiot," she said.

"Excuse me."

"He doesn't like being called names," said the first guy.

"Hitting a little too close to home," she said.

"Look bitch," said the first guy, loudly. And then quietly: "You killed your husband. You're a murderer. In fact, it doesn't really matter what you tell us because forensics will find out everything. Don't you watch tv? Don't you know they always find out the truth?"

“Then I’ll be home within the hour.” For effect, she looked at the crooked clock hanging on the lime-green wall.

For the first time, the second guy wrote something on the piece of paper clipped to his clipboard.

“Don’t I get some phone calls?”

She lay there for a while, everything, every thought it seemed, occurred to her. She could feel the warm blood on her back, moving into and through her sweatshirt, and she could feel it on the back of her head, in her hair, and there was a little slash of it on the front of her shirt that went right through the letter *U*, in University. She was so hurt. She looked at his face and it wasn’t her husband’s face. Her husband’s face didn’t have a bullet hole in it. Her husband’s face was alive, and warm and pulsing, and tan. This face was white and still and cold, not alive. This is not a face, she thought. Where is my husband? He should be home any minute now.

But there was no one to call, and she didn’t have a lawyer. There hadn’t ever been a need for one, until now.

They were staring at her.

She started to cry, but forced it down.

“Let’s make a deal,” said the first guy.

“God,” she said. “This is like bad television.”

“Yes. It is, isn’t it?” said the second guy.

“You tell the story one more time and then we do some paper work and if you promise to be good you might get to go home.”

“What do you want to hear? You want me to say I shot him?” She put her hands in her pants pockets and looked out the long skinny window. I’m always looking out windows, she thought.

“We want to hear the truth, mam. Is that the truth?”

“Here’s the truth. The God’s honest truth: I don’t know who that was today.” She couldn’t force it down anymore.

“He’s your husband, mam,” said the second guy, calmly. “A mister—” looking at his clipboard “—Gerald Wilson Kendall. Your husband. Who came home early from work today and told you about an affair he was having with a colleague and, what? Told you he loved her and he wanted a divorce? Something like that? And you were, rightfully, pissed. But you didn’t want a divorce, and he was insistent and so on and so

forth, and you shot him in the head. Something like that?" He stopped and looked at the first guy.

And the first guy picked it up: "Your husband, mam, who is, as I speak, being zipped up in a black bag and put in the back of a van, dead, so that he can be taken to a medical examiner and they can figure out what we already know..." He stopped and glanced at the second guy and then back to her. "Your husband, mam, that's who he was."

"I know," she said in a hoarse voice, looking with red eyes out the long skinny window, "but that's not my husband."

And then she got out of the bed and went to the phone and dialed the three numbers, and a very weak voice on the other end said "nine-one-one emergency, how can I assist you?" and she knew it was the first in a series of very hard to answer questions.