

Temporary Insanity

Jeff wasn't home. She knew he wouldn't be. She could tell when she looked around that he hadn't been there in days; the house had that stale, un-lived-in smell. The shower was bone dry, as were the plants. The milk in the refrigerator was the same gallon that had been there when she'd left two weeks before.

She'd known. She'd known every time she called and there was no answer.

She decided it must be Jo Lynn. She'd only met her once. Starving third-world thin with stringy shoulder length dishwater blonde hair, sunken eyes, and sores all over her arms. She was Jeff's pot connection. She lived in a trailer park at the edge of town with her four stick-figure children.

Without actually deciding she was going to do so, she drove to the trailer park. Then she just drove around it until she saw Jo Lynn's banged up 1977 Buick Skyhawk with the crooked front bench seat clearly visible through the cracked windshield and the Visqueen driver's side window. She had second thoughts as she walked to the front door of Jo Lynn's house—an Airstream travel trailer with a red and rotting plywood shed built part-way around it. She hoped it wasn't too obvious that she'd begun to wheeze.

Jo Lynn opened the door with a look of surprise and invited her in. Elizabeth glanced around the room, noting the toys and dirty clothes strewn about but saw nothing that was identifiably Jeff's. Jo Lynn motioned her to a rickety, low-slung chair, circa 1970, with several articles of clothing spilling over the sides, as well as a few broken toys.

"Do you want a cup of coffee?" her hostess asked, pouring a cup without waiting for an answer. Jo Lynn

draped the laundry over her arm and batted the toys off the chair before plopping the cup of coffee in front of Elizabeth.

"Um, sure, I'd love some." Elizabeth sat on the edge of the stained chair. She only sat down because her legs were shaking.

"So what brings you here Elizabeth?"

"I'm looking for Jeff."

"Jeff's not here."

They were both silent for a moment. Elizabeth's hand trembled so badly she had to set the coffee on the burned formica table. She lit a cigarette. "Has he been staying here?"

"Yeah."

"With you?"

"Why do you care? What business is it of yours?"

"I'm his wife."

"You're splitting up. He told me."

"Well, he neglected to mention it to me." For a while it was quiet, and Elizabeth could hear nothing but her own labored breathing and the war drum that had begun in her head.

"You're not getting a divorce?"

"No. We are not."

"Then where have you been all this time?"

"You mean for the last two weeks? I have been on vacation with my mother in Mexico— are you sleeping with my husband?"

Jo Lynn looked down for a minute and bit her lip. "He told me you were splitting up. I wouldn't have done it otherwise. He said you were done with him. I don't know; it just happened."

"Yes. It happens with some regularity." She briefly wondered what venereal diseases she'd been exposed to in the process. The thought made her nauseous. "Do you know where he is?"

"Yeah, I think he's doing work on Dr. Rollins's house

with Jack.”

“Okay.”

“He shouldn’t’ve told me you were getting divorced. That was shitty. I wouldn’t’ve done it, Elizabeth, even wasted, if he hadn’t’ve told me that.”

“Never mind, Jo Lynn. I’m not mad at you.” She stood, the room suddenly blurred by the pounding in her head. She was tired. She had tried so many times to make it work, she was tired of hearing yet again—“she’s just a friend, Babe. I’ve known her forever. She just needed a ride—her car fixed—a couple of bucks—she’s crazy, she’s always had a crush on me, she’s just trying to break us up”—*insert more B. S. here*. She was tired of patiently waiting for everything to be all right—“just as soon as I get this job—get a different job—get myself together—get another car—get out of this town—get through school”—*insert more lame excuses here*. She was tired of rationalizing and justifying his crap to herself over and over again—“He’s just having a rough time—of course he could have just forgotten to pay the electric after I gave him the money for it, things happen—well, they don’t look much alike but I guess she could be his cousin—his boss just doesn’t understand him—he’d never sleep with her, she’s not his type.” She’d wasted so much of herself.

“Where are you going? What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to talk to Jeff.”

“You shouldn’t talk to him like this. You don’t look so good. Why don’t you just sit for a few minutes and have another cup of coffee.”

She wanted to scream and claw the bitch’s eyes out. “I’m okay. Really.” She had to get out of this stifling, wretched place. “I’ll just go home for a little while and try to get myself together,” she lied and smiled. Sweetly, she hoped.

“That’s a good idea. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know.” Jo Lynn followed her out the door to her car.

“It’s okay. Really. If it weren’t you, it would have been

someone else.”

She drove to Dr. Rollins's house in a fog. She couldn't think. She had no idea what she was going to say or do. *That's it! I'm not doing this anymore— I'm not doing this anymore. I can't. I won't. I'll just tell him to get out. Then I'll go home and throw all of his shit in the trash. No. I'll burn it— I'll burn it all— I'll set his fucking boat on fire, too.*

She pulled up in front of the house and sat there with the motor running. Jeff's face registered shock, quickly replaced by calculation. After a moment, he walked over to the car window. Dr. Rollins was gossiping with Jack on the front porch and the two of them watched the couple reunite.

“Babe! You're home! Did you just get in this morning?”

“No. I came in last night, which you would have known had you been home.” She couldn't breathe again.

“Oh. Well, I got a little wasted last night and stayed over at Jack's house. I knew you wouldn't want me to drive like that. Besides, we were working together again today anyway.”

“You've haven't been home in at least a week. I don't think you've been home since I left.”

“I've been staying with Jack. The house gets lonely when you're gone.”

She turned her head away for a minute and stared out the windshield. She could smell the exhaust; she wondered if that was what was making her so dizzy. Elizabeth looked back at him. “Stop lying, Jeff. Where have you been? Just tell me the truth. For once, just tell me the truth.” Her voice was flat. She felt calmer.

“I told you, honey. I've been at Jack's.” His blue eyes stared into hers. The sun caught in his lovely, wavy hair and Elizabeth fought an urge to snatch him by it and yank his head into the side of the car. Repeatedly.

“I just left Jo Lynn's. She's under the impression that we're getting a divorce.”

Silence.

Merciful blessed silence.

“Yeah,” he said, straightening up and stepping away from the car. “Well, at least she’s warm.” He turned his back on her and started to walk away.

I used to be warm once, too, she thought, when I believed “love” (she visualized his head slamming into the door), “honor” (again), “cherish” (and again) and “forsaking all others” (twice more—a bit of blood dripping down his forehead now) was for real and not just pretty words from a pretty boy.

She looked at the trees at the end of the street and had an overwhelming urge to drive the car into them – just floor it and drive as fast as she could. She could hear the shrieking metal, feel the satisfying impact.

Her foot itched. She eased it off the brake.

Jeff stepped in front of the car as he walked back over to his drinking buddies, pausing to glare at her one more time through the windshield.

For a split second, she imagined running him down. Driving that smirk off his face forever. *No*, she thought. Then she hit the gas.