

The man climbed the three steps to his front porch. He noticed, through the frosted glass on his front door, that the kitchen lights were still on. *Great*, he thought to himself. *No use trying to be quite.*

He opened his front door, not bothering to stifle the rattle of his keys against the door, and then let it close loudly. After hanging his cap on the wall next to the door, he made his way into the kitchen.

“Hey, baby. What are you still doing up?” He asked, wiping the exhaustion out of his eyes.

“Waitin on you. When your husband doesn’t come home until after two in the morning, you get to thinkin.”

The man opened the refrigerator door, stared for a few moments, then pulled out a bottle of beer. He sat on a stool at the bar, opposite of his wife. “Baby, you know I was working. There was another fire at the plant, and we had to contain it.” He stared at the amber glass bottle, his hands enclosing it.

“Uh huh. Another fire?”

“Yeah.”

“Seems to me you all need to be more careful.”

“I s’pose so. We got a lot of green workers that don’t know what they’re doing yet.”

Silence filled the room.

“Well, let me tell you what I think.”

The man wiped his eyes again. *Here we go.*

“I’m thinkin the only fire that’s been started is between you and that whore Mary.”

*Christ, there it is.*

“I mean, you don’t come home til after two twice—“

*With her, it’s always gotta be another woman keepin me out. Why the hell is it never actually my job keepin me out late? There’s gonna be fires in a steel mill.*

“—never do nothin to deserve this. You know, I always knew you’d end up—“

*Hell, I might as well find me another woman. At least I’ll get something out of all this mess.*

“—and then, you know what? I see you talkin up a storm with her at church and—“

The man raised his hand to crack the top of his beer when his wife snatched it out of his grasp. “Are you even listening to me?”

“Yeah, I’m listenin to you. Give me my beer back, woman. I’m gonna need it to make it through this bullshit.” He snapped.

*Shit, shouldn’t have said that.*

His wife’s eyes opened wide, her mouth agape as she tried to process what he’d just said.

“Oh, you’re gonna need this?” She screamed and threw the bottle against the wall behind her. It didn’t explode, it just cracked and leaked onto the floor.

“What the hell are you doin?” The man stood up, alarmed by his wife’s sudden outburst. “Will you calm down, please? I’m not seein anyone else.”

“Why am I not good enough for you?” She was crying now.

The man sighed deeply, and obviously. “Baby, I keep tellin you that you’re fine how you are.”

“You know, I’ve been talkin to Jenny and she says—“

*Jesus, he thought, figures Jenny’s behind all this. That woman treats Cosmopolitan like gospel.*

“—I mean, when was the last time you took me out? I can’t even—“

*How much longer is this gonna last?* He wondered. *It’s already pushin’ three oclock.*

“—and look at you, can’t even listen to me for five minutes.” The man lifted his head.

“Listen baby, I’m sorry you’re upset. But I gotta work early tomorrow, so can we—“

“Don’t you ‘listen baby’ me, bastard.” She snapped.

“Who the hell are you calling a bastard? I work my ass off for you, for this house, and for that goddamned beer you just threw against the wall.” He stood up, yelling now. “And I come home to constant naggin and bitchin. I ain’t got time or money for a second woman, cause the first one’s taking both already!”

Smack.

Without warning, the man’s wife raised her hand and slapped him across the face, hard. His nerves, already fried from the long day and impromptu argument, snapped, pushing the man beyond his limit. He shoved his wife hard – too hard – causing her to stumble backwards, where she slipped in the puddle of beer, fell backwards and hit the base of her head on the corner of the kitchen table. She fell to the floor, convulsing, until she finally stopped moving. The man watched on in horror.

“Baby, stop messing around and get up.” He said, walking over to her. “Please get up. Oh God, what happened? Why the hell’d you have to throw the bottle? Why the hell’d you have to slip, I didn’t push you that hard. C’mon baby, get up. Please, please get up!” The man stooped beside his wife, looking for any sign of life.

After a while, the man rose from beside his dead wife, and with shaking hands opened up the fridge and pulled out another bottle of beer. He returned to the bar, sat on the stool, and buried his tear-soaked face in his arms as he tried to figure out what to do next.

His mind turned to the gun he kept in the nightstand.