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The Butterfly Killer

Carolyn Weisbecker

The cardboard box sat high on the top shelf of my bedroom closet, shoved behind a mountain of fabric scraps and a snow globe that held a bride and groom in a passionate embrace—a wedding gift from twenty years ago. I was searching for a belt for my new pair of jeans when my eyes rested on the box. I felt a pull, a force that cajoled me to come closer. The belt forgotten, I jumped up first to grab the statue, a second time to shove the fabric aside, and with my third jump, I managed to knock the box to the shelf's edge. Then stretching on my tiptoes, I gave the box a hard shove. Things happened fast. The box tumbled into my outstretched hands like a happy toddler jumping off the monkey bars into his mother's waiting arms.

I plopped on the hardwood floor and untied the twine that held the box hostage. Dust greeted my nose, and I resisted the urge to sneeze as I yanked the lid free. I blinked. Piles of crinkle-edged black and white photos gazed up at me. They pleaded for me to take a look. I picked one up and smiled.

The photo of the little girl showed baggy shorts to her knees, a tank top, and two pigtails resting on thin shoulders. Although in black and white, I remembered the flowered shorts—her favorite—and behind her, the garden diligently tended by her father bursting with corn that tickled the clouds, tomatoes, and bell peppers that didn't ring. She never understood why. The girl beamed up at the camera, her small hands holding up a large mason jar that held a blotch of gray. I imagined the blotch was a flaw, a smudge from dirty fingers, or the result of poor photography. Then I remembered. It was none of those things.

The smudge was a large Monarch butterfly, its black; its claw-like feet clutched the shriveled-up twig the girl had placed inside hoping it would make the butterfly feel at home. She was proud of her find, that much was sure, based on her upward grin and the defiant tilt of her head. If I could ask the girl what she thought at that moment—after her mother snapped the photo on a whim—she would say that she had just caught the most beautiful butterfly in the world. Throughout the summer of 1973, she said that often.

I remember her.

Running from flower to flower, skipping through the peony bushes that separated her yard from the neighbor's, she hovered and crouched and sprang onto unsuspecting butterflies like a sleek, hungry lioness hunting her prey. She thrust the butterflies into jars, one after another and then used old coffee cans until she ran out of those, too. Soon, the garden shed at the rear of the yard had no more shelves to hold her butterflies, so she began setting the jars and cans on the floor. She crossed her fingers and hoped her mother wouldn't stop by the shed to check on her as she twirled around, her arms flung out to embrace her butterfly sanctuary.

The girl loved butterflies ever since her grandfather pointed them out to her while he sat in his flower garden, a hose in one hand, a beer in the other. His eyes lifted to hers as he recited the different species. He'd nod and say, "That one there is a black swallowtail. And there? That's a tiger swallowtail. The prettiest one, I think."

That's when the girl saw something different. "What's that?"

Her grandfather furrowed his brow. "That one is a monarch. Lots of them around here cause of the milkweed." The girl's eyes grew large from awe as the distance between her

and the monarch grew. Her grandfather told her everything he knew about the monarch.

The monarch butterfly, sometimes called the tiger butterfly, boasted glorious orange patterns on its wings; the patterns encased by perfect black lines sprinkled with white dots like pebbles tracing a familiar path. These were the butterflies, with their vibrant colors and happy prancing, that the girl watched with tender eyes. When she told Miss. Kramer, her fourth-grade teacher, about the monarchs, Miss. Kramer said, "Did you know their wings are covered in pixie dust?" Then she laughed. "No, I'm teasing. But if you touch their wings, you'll end up with glittery dust on your fingers. They're scales. They have millions of them that keeps their wings colorful." When the girl boasted that she collected monarchs and kept them in glass jars, Ms. Kramer made her promise to free them right away. "Butterflies are special, honey. You don't want them to die, do you?" The girl promised to let them go.

Her classmate, Patrick, overheard them. He pulled her aside. "Don't listen to her. They're just bugs, like crickets and spiders. My brother and me catches them and pins them to a cork board. Do you do that with the ones you catch?"

She shook her head, horrified by the thought of it.

"Oh, you will." Patrick smirked. "All butterfly catchers do that."

She gasped because she couldn't imagine such a thing. The next morning, she rushed to the shed to fulfill her promise to free the butterflies, but when she opened the door, a hand from the heavens reached down and struck her with such great force she cried out and staggered back.

Perhaps she always knew it would happen. That one day she would skip to the shed only

to find that the old mason jars and coffee cans held a grim finding—not the fluttering sound of butterflies—but instead, a pile of faded wings and curled black legs. She carried the jars and cans outside, one by one, and set each on the grass. Then, she opened the lids to shake out the insects. As the pile grew, a late summer breeze stumbled past, lifting the dried insects high into the air, until they, like her heart, tumbled back to the ground.

Her brother jogged over to stand beside her. “You killed them all. You’re a butterfly killer.” He sighed. “Wait until Mom finds out what you did!”

She pushed herself up and ran straight to her bedroom, ignoring her mother’s calls that lunch was ready. It was her favorite—tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches—but she ignored the ache in her stomach and crawled under her bed, not caring about the dust balls, dead bugs, or broken toys that dug into her back. In the dark silence, the words *butterfly killer* echoed through her mind. She couldn’t ignore them. It was, at that moment, that her whimpers turned to sobs, and her sobs turned into a wail. Her mind nudged her, urging her to accept the truth: she had killed all the monarchs in the world. They were gone forever, and it was her fault.

The silence goaded her. You’re a horrible girl. How could you do such a thing?

The girl squeezed her eyes, hard, and wished she could go back in time. She remembered when she first saw them while standing at the kitchen window, her arms propped up on the windowsill, and the sun urging her to join it. Robins, flitting wrens, and an occasional cardinal took turns at the backyard birdbath. But it wasn’t the birds that caught her attention.

Two monarch butterflies fluttered and swayed from daisy

to daisy, peony to peony, rose to rose; each flower more enthralled than the last by the pair's antics. She remembered rushing out the door, down the porch steps, and to the flower garden where the butterflies still played. Without thinking, she inched her way closer and hovered her hand over the butterfly's wings until she could squeeze them together. She caught it. Her breath came to a halt, and nothing mattered but the butterfly in her hand and the nudging of its wings as it fought for freedom.

"Don't worry," she whispered. "I won't hurt you."

Her memories shattered as the bedroom door flew open.

"Carolyn?"

Her mother got down on her hands and knees and peered under the bed. "What's wrong, sweetheart?"

The girl crawled out from under the bed and wiped her face with one sleeve. "I killed all the butterflies, Mom."

"I know. Your brother told me. You can't expect a living creature to survive in a jar, honey. Especially a butterfly. But, don't worry. You'll see more of them." Her mother wiped the girl's face with the edge of her apron. "Why don't you go outside and play? You'll feel better."

Didn't her mother hear her? She killed them all. They wouldn't be back!

The girl trudged out of the house, careful to avoid looking at the waving flowers in the back where she often caught her prey. She wandered into the front yard instead, picked up a stick, and dragged it across the chain-link fence that separated the yard from the street. The whirling of a water spray caught her attention, and her head jerked up to look for the source.

It was old Mrs. Howard, the neighbor across the street. She just turned on the water sprinkler so her herbs could drink. The girl's heart perked up at the sight of the old woman, and she raced over to join her, hoping Mrs. Howard would offer a few of her prized peanut butter cookies and maybe a glass of milk. Cookies might help her feel better, she thought, even if she didn't deserve them.

"Hello, Mrs. Howard," she called to the old woman's back.

Mrs. Howard turned. "Hello, sweetie. Have you seen any butterflies today?"

The girl's heart felt sharp and jagged, like the chipped concrete steps of the abandoned church down the street. She swallowed hard, hoping Mrs. Howard wouldn't discover she had killed them all.

The girl shook her head.

Mrs. Howard kneeled to pluck a stray weed. "Don't worry. You will. They come to my yard later in the afternoon. They always do, you know."

The girl's eyes burned, and she felt the familiar weight of tears. "I don't think that'll happen. You see," she took a deep breath and decided to be honest. "I've killed them all. But I didn't mean to do it."

Mrs. Howard squinted. "Killed them how?"

"I put them in jars so I could keep them," the girl said. "I didn't know it would hurt them."

Mrs. Howard groaned as she stood. She dug into a pocket of her housecoat. "Maybe this'll make you feel better. I found it at the dime store."

The girl blinked, surprised by this unexpected gift.

“It’s a nice little booklet on monarch butterflies. Your momma told me how much you like butterflies. Now you can be an expert.”

“I don’t deserve any presents, Mrs. Howard. But thank you.”

“Now, don’t be shy.” Mrs. Howard pressed the booklet into the little girl’s hand. “Read it. And going forward, catch them with your eyes only.” She grinned. “That way, other folks can enjoy them, too.”

As soon as the girl ran back to her yard, she plopped onto the top of the picnic table, legs crossed, and began to read. “In May and June, the Monarch lives for anywhere from fifteen to fifty days after metamorphosing into an adult butterfly. This generation lays their eggs in milkweed plants, but the next generation are the lucky ones. They migrate to a warmer climate as the weather changes and live for six to eight months until they return.”

The rest of the summer passed, and the girl didn’t see any more butterflies.

That is, until the next summer. She stood at the kitchen window, arms propped up on the windowsill, watching the birds—mostly young robins with a few bossy sparrows—flutter around the backyard birdbath. Her mouth curved into a smile. Two large Monarch butterflies hovered before her eyes before climbing the morning breeze.

I set the photo back in the box and returned it to its original resting place. I haven’t forgotten the little girl who loved butterflies, who watched them prance from one flower to the next, who dreamed in orange and black wings amid the rolling green hill of her backyard. I never caught another butterfly again.

The Three Musketeers of the Accounts Department

John Grey

James,
I'm glad to hear you've found something.
I really am.

Same with you, Chris.
The pay's not great
but it could lead to something.

Despite the company closing,
you've both landed on your feet.

And here's me,
still sending out resumes,
knocking on doors,
listening to apathetic secretaries
say, "We're going with someone else."

In the meantime,
why don't we get together
Now, while we still know how.

War

Psycho Kanev

Hard Arabic light
falls
on the adobe hut

The little girl
in rags
begs for food
from the soldier
who
killed her mother

Betty-Jean

Alan Parry

you sit there
and tell me
in that

tender/inimitable

song of yours
that

our day will come

and
i believe

you

Practicum

A.J. Howells

He was in fifth grade,
the only true native to this land
and more of a man than I can still wish to be.

I pulled him off a student
who had stolen his basketball during recess.
As I dragged him away,
he screamed at me,
calling me a “fuckin’ cowboy faggot.”

I wasn’t there to be a white savior.
I wasn’t there to be a missionary.
I wasn’t there to be a social justice warrior.

The deal went like this:
when you select your student teaching placement,
a menu drops down listing multiple doors to possible futures.
You could stay where you were,
go to this city,
go to that city,
or choose the longer option,
rusting at the bottom of the list,
in smaller print than the others:

Enjoy snowy Pierre, South Dakota in the height of winter
when the negative eighteen-degree weather
will force you into thermals, work clothes, and a dirty Carhart
and you’ll still feel the ice plunge into you deeply enough to hit marrow,
even though you’ve only walked to work,
which is less than a hundred feet from your trailer door.

In still smaller print:

Witness a third-world country,
within a first world country,
where whites still slam their windows shut
when you walk past their houses
with a trail of red-skinned children behind you,
out for a morning stroll,
in seemingly improved weather.

And even smaller:

Be greeted with cries of “FUCK YOU”
from five-year-olds,
and show an eighth-grade boy
(one who once watched his mother stab his father to death)
how to diagram sentences.

And, miraculously, even smaller still:

Upon completion of the course,
you'll have drunk enough fire water
you'll believe you can walk across the Missouri River.
You'll have drowned your white guilt
while lying in a snowbank,
listening to wind roaring across the plains,
mixed with coyote cries,
and a people clawing their way out of red, white, and blue jumpers,
hoping something to find something remotely resembling freedom.

This is the option you select.

It's the only one you want,
and you didn't know why then,
and you still don't know why now.

But you do know that every ounce of your patriotism died on the plains,
somewhere between the horizon
and a sky spewing snow and bolts of lightning.

You never speak with the boy about what he called you.
but when you see him next,
he's on a soccer field,
and his smile isn't mocking,
but genuine,
and it unzips him for a second
before disappearing
and sealing up a childhood.

You too smile for a second,
and then watch your students lose the game.

Unfated

John Grey

Don't worry.
It's a world of chance events
not predestination.
Action still means something.
And the doer,
not the laws of physics,
owns it.

My scientist buddy
has been looking at things
at the subatomic level
for so long,
he has a hard time
coming up for air...
or even reality.

But even he
must conclude
that what was once believed
to be unalterable
is merely the back and forth,
the intermingling of chance,
as if some particles
eye each other from across
a crowded disco floor
and others cross the white line
on dark rainy nights.

So get used to it.
From hereon,
anything could happen.
Possibilities are endless.
Endless encompasses you.

Clefting

Yuan Changming

Between two high notes
The melody gives a crack
Long enough
To allow my entire selfhood to enter
Like a fish jumping back
Into the night water

Both the fish and I leave no
Trace behind us, and the world
Remains undisturbed as we swim
Deeper and deeper in blue silence

Upon my return, I find the music
Still going on, while the fish has
Disappeared into the unknown

Drowning in You

Alan Parry

there will never be
anybody else

i'm drowning in you

your waves
toss me around
like a
skiff

powerless/pacific

content to be
swallowed
by your storm

The Unknown

Psycho Kanev

A small lizard on a boulder
looking straight at the sun's
scorching blaze. The day
continues to develop its endless
narrative.

The doves in the distance listen
to the bells chiming deafly.
Somewhere in this world
a dictator issues an order for mass murder.
It's not
just lies alone but simple truths as well.

My Crows

Yuan Changming

I.

Still, still hidden
Behind old shirts and pants
Like an inflated sock
Hung on a slanting coat hanger

With a prophecy stuck in its throat
Probably too dark or ominous
To yaw, even to breathe

No one knows when or how
It will fly out of the closet, and call

II.

Like billions of dark butterflies
Beating their wings
Against nightmares, rather
Like myriads of
Spirited coal-flakes
Spread from the sky
Of another world
A heavy black snow
Falls, falling, fallen
Down towards the horizon
Of my mind, where a little crow
White as a lost patch
Of autumn fog
Is trying to fly, flapping
From bough to bough

Roach

R.E. Hengsterman

The first one comes from beneath the refrigerator: antennae probing, underbelly of its exoskeleton scrubbing against the dusty linoleum, its compressed body—near invulnerable to squashing—scuttling into the light.

“Fucking roaches,” he yells.

A second, then a third reddish-brown critter scurries across the floor as he rocks the appliance.

“This is your fault,” he says. “You’re a slob. Look at this place.” Crumbs crunch underfoot as he works the fridge from its nook. Scores of insects scatter.

“Damn it.”

He whacks a yogurt container—the foil lid half-peeled—as his hands knife the air, sending key lime parfait splattering onto the cabinets.

“Don’t you ever pick up your mess?” Anger sloshes over him in waves. “I want this place clean before I get home.”

She maneuvers to the sink, taking a path of avoidance around the island. With her fingernails she gouges the dried food from the surface of the porcelain as the warm water cascades across her skin.

Over her shoulder his anger sags. He resembles a deflated balloon. Under the faint light of the moon the dishes clink against themselves like delicate bones.

“I’m moving out. You don’t appreciate me,” she says. “Do you understand? I’m leaving.”

She gathers and repeats. “I’m moving out!”

Her face uncoils in the mirror before she flops on the twist of the unmade bed.

“Who I am kidding,” she mutters.

As the morning sun divides the room, a roach scurries across the lace of her panties which lay at the base of her dresser. Its movements are erratic; it’s skittering fast and showing no fear.

When he isn’t angry or yelling or demeaning, she finds him distasteful.

Tonight he’s digging beneath the kitchen sink like a dog for a bone. Window cleaner, a box of stainless scrubbers, and automatic detergent spill onto the floor. He locates the can of Raid—shakes it—then tosses everything back. Except the insecticide.

She watches him lay on the floor—his paunchy belly girdled by his jeans—directing a stream of Raid, in a most cheerful state, beneath the fridge. He coughs from the spatter, smearing a thin strand of snot across his face. Then he shuffles on his back using his shoulders and legs, repeating the heavy-handed fumigation into every nook until the kitchen lies in a chemical fog and the can knocks with emptiness.

The toxin rouses more roaches from their nest. Bunches scatter to the fringes: antennae flailing, wings unfolding, torsos spinning in frenzied figure-of-eights. The neurotoxin insisting on their demise as they buck on their backs in defective spasm, tightening into a coil until death.

The slaughtered roaches overtake her sleep.

Beside her, the doughy flesh of his double chin, his fat loach of a tongue occluding his trachea, choking him until stimulated by the primal drive to breathe it resonates with a deep snort as she heads to the kitchen for mint ice cream.

There's a peacefulness without his presence. She runs a finger along the cool granite, into the empty sink. The ghost of his words still echoing in the quiet space.

A handful of insects lay prostrate on the floor, counter and one in the drain. Half-in, half-out. Movement from behind the paper towels catches her attention as she tosses not one but two scoops into the bowl because there's no one awake to criticize her weight.

She crinkles her nose as a monstrous roach emerges from beneath the clutter. Its movements are deliberate. Its antennae bobbing. She brushes a finger against its polished, mahogany-colored shell before flicking it away. It skitters across the counter then returns, its head raised, wings spread. She places her hand on the granite surface and the bug crawls across her skin. There's an electric pricking sensation from its stiff claws that pulses beneath her flesh.

An hour later she's collected a dozen refugees in a Pyrex dish: bloated, lustrous and the color of slick sewage. The bottom of their glass enclosure blemished with feces and

regurgitate. Their antennae wagging as they navigate their ordered confines. She can hear them, the quiet friction of their spiny feet and their hissing, a summons to proliferate.

In the morning he's cheerful. He drinks his coffee and scours the kitchen for survivors. When he's satisfied, and the full weight of the coffee has kicked in, he heads to the bathroom. Grunts erupt from the porcelain, escaping the shortcomings of his slack jaw, and through a crack in the door. Guttural, disgusting, the toilet flushes. There's no gurgle—a typical sound caused by their old plumping—as the bowl drains. Instead he howls as water sloshes over the rim of the toilet.

“Motherfucker,” he yells. “You clogged the toilet again!”

He storms from the bathroom, the slosh from his wet socks slapping the floor, and grabs her by the wrist. His re-possession is violent. She's on her hands and knees—he's standing over her with his foot buried in her buttocks—as she sops up the stool-colored water with hand towels.

She spends weeks with her specimens: studying their behavior, developing a deep affection for their smell, their lewd cacophony.

Her most prized possession, the dominant female, growing larger as the others procreate. She moves her assemblage from the Pyrex to an empty twenty-gallon fish tank in the garage. Paper egg cartons and food scraps fill a quarter of the tank. An old lamp light warms the surface.

She stirs the nesting with her fingers. A handful of roach-

es writhe to the surface, offering a soft, collective chirp to her presence. She dips her hand to the wrist and emerges with a writhing layer of organisms. Their antennae vibrating against her skin en masse. Her insides buzzing with gratification.

The large female pushes to the fore. Over the top of the lesser order males. She raises her wings and exposes her glands in the calling posture of courtship, arching her abdomen against her finger. Beneath her the collective trills.

The female judders, leaving behind a viscous, colorless fluid and chalk-white residue. There's a tingle below her waist as the volatile attractants spike.

“Your problem is you don't obey me,” he says with a chuckle. There's no hint of conciliation as he slaps her ass with an open hand.

She knows what has “flipped his mood”: the act of eradicating a weaker entity. His dominance over the invaders. The presence of reclaimed manhood flowing through his machinery. He's risen from the couch to say goodnight, which means he wants sex.

On these nights there are no tirades: for her alleged insubordination, for her stupidity, for her lack of cleanliness, for her overwhelming failure as a wife.

His insignificant manhood slides against the insides of her dry vagina, his dull moan leaking between the thin walls. He believes she owes him this moment, to make him happy as the object of his power and control.

When he's finished he snores.

She rises above him to straddle his naked, limp unpalatable flesh with hers. Expanding her arms like ethereal wings and staring downwards, trying to remember why she ever loved him.

With her mouth full of quiet, she lowers her lips upon his, resting on his parched flesh for a moment before releasing the roach. It arises from her silent scream into his throat, past his pharynx, and nestles in his trachea. Its wings unfolding; its body a defensive shield.

Within minutes it returns to the surface unharmed, his breath now absent.

She slides off him and, laying side-by-side, opens herself in pleasure, taking the roach inside to nest.

Excerpts from a Marriage

John Grey

Found a key
but to which door?
What kind of unlucky bird is that,
discovered, after the rain,
having landed in a puddle of its own death?

And what kind of item
could you buy at a flea market
that would be of any use?

I know you think you'e god.
But the God? Or just a god?

Now where did I put my pills?
And in which novel on this shelf did I stuff the C-note?
F Scott Fitzgerald, tell me. Is it you?
Losing things is the direct opposite of staying calm.

Do you reckon we will ever again play the old board game?
Should I toss it out
or keep it so that I can ask this very same question
a year from now?
Take a deep breath and maybe
finally listen to that new Leonard Cohen CD.

In my dreams, I stumbled into a woman named Samantha.
And now, come morning, my leg is aching.
And you're weeping on my shoulder.
Part of my husband duties is to take the weight.

We both like to lie down in the afternoon
though not always together.
You prefer the perfume of new cut grass.
I'd rather the intermittent hoopla of a ball game.

Ever wondered why the dog circles like that before it sits?
Do you ever wonder about anything?
Really, all this constant questioning of nobody in particular
leaves me exhausted.

I would circle like a dog myself
except that I am not a dog.
I am only this—endless straight lines.
They have a meaning you will explain to me some day.

Forecasting the Fate: A Wuxing Poem

Yuan Changming

- Believe it or not, the ancient Chinese 5-Agent Principle
accounts for us all.

Water (born in a year ending in 2 or 3)
-helps wood but hinders fire; helped by metal but hindered by earth
with her transparent tenderness
coded with colorless violence
she is always ready to support
or sink the powerful boat
 sailing south

Wood (born in a year ending 4 or 5)
-helps fire but hinders earth; helped by water but hindered by metal
rings in rings have been opened or broken
like echoes that roll from home to home
each containing fragments of green
trying to tell their tales
 from the forest's depths

Fire (born in a year ending 6 or 7)
-helps earth but hinders metal; helped by wood but hindered by water
your soft power bursting from your ribcage
as enthusiastic as a phoenix is supposed to be
when you fly your lipless kisses
you reach out your hearts
 until they are all broken

Earth (born in a year ending in 8 or 9)
-helps metal but hinders water; helped by fire but hindered by wood
i think not; therefore, I am not
what I am, but I have a color
the skin my heart wears inside out
tattooed intricately
 with footprints of history

Metal (born in a year ending in 0 or 1)
-helps water but hinders wood; helped by earth but hindered by fire
he used to be totally dull-colored
because he came from the earth's inside
now he has become a super-conductor
for cold words, hot pictures and light itself
 all being transmitted through his throat

Wait for it

Paul Lewellan

“Stop it!” Erika turned to face Jerry. Despite his stealth, she’d heard him approach her locker.

He feigned surprise. “What?”. At six-foot-five, Jerry stood a foot taller than the seventeen-year-old junior.

The senior athlete wore Keens hiking boots, Dockers pleated khakis, and a tight Samantha Fish concert-t that showed off his muscular chest. He stood stiff-backed, resisting the temptation to lean down towards her. His mother told him that good posture gave him majesty.

“You know what,” Erika hissed, as she pulled a pink envelope from her locker. A white lace valentine slipped out and fell to the floor. Jerry bent down to retrieve it. “The valentines have to stop. Valentine’s Day isn’t for two weeks.”

“I wanted you to know how I feel.”

Erika snatched the card from him and tore it apart. “I’m sick of hearing how you feel, and I want it to stop.”

Her statement troubled Jerry. He hesitated. “What do you want to stop?”

“Valentines. No more! Not in my locker, not in the mail, not on my front step, or wedged into my Physics book. None.” As he processed her statement, Jerry bent down to pick up the pieces. Erika stamped on them, just missing his fingers. “Don’t touch that valentine!”

Erica wore a short white skirt, grungy Nike cross-trainers, and a Quad City Mallards hockey jersey. Curly red hair exploded on her head. He'd never wanted to kiss her more than now, but a crowd had gathered in the locker bay. He knew she wouldn't let him.

He's clueless, Erica mused. She noted his brown-eyed hurt-puppy-dog face. She knew she needed to be firm. "No more roses dropped on my desk before class," she said, pushing her index finger into Jerry's chest to accentuate her point. "No more notes left on my car windshield, no more UPS packages sent to the restaurant where I work, no more lawn gnomes, no more stuffed penguins, no more photos taped to my gym locker, no more gun magazine subscriptions, and for God's sake, stop Tweeting my grandmother."

"What am I supposed to do?" Jerry whined.

"Wait for it."

Erika slammed the locker shut, spun the dial, and faced him. "You need to just wait for it."

He blinked. "Wait for what?"

She shouldered her battered red sports bag and grabbed her lacrosse stick. She needed to get to Physics class. "Wait for the remotest hint that I am interested in another date. Then, and only then, can you ask me out."

Jerry reached out to stop her, but she turned on him. "And if you ever touch me, without my consent, I'll break every fucking bone in your hand." She made eye contact. "Your pitching hand..." Erika noted the fear in his eyes. "You know I'm capable of doing that, don't you?"

He nodded. "You've made that very clear."

“Give me some space.” She started down the hall.

Just before he was out of earshot, while Erica imagined he was still staring at her athletic thighs, she stopped and spoke without turning around. “But when lacrosse season starts, I damn well better see you in the stands.”

Erika smiled, but, of course, Jerry couldn’t see it. It wasn’t time for him to see how much he amused her. Wait for it, she told herself. Wait for it.

Contributors

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