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Evisceration Line

That gout attack was a godsend.

My buddies at the plant tell me I should have beat the shit out of my ex long ago, even before things started to go south, but I never did. It might have kept her in check now, like she'd have a taste of what to expect if she ever thought to send the cops my way, asking about her damn truck. Which she did, even though it's a good sixteen years since we've been done and finished with each other.

But the swollen foot that has become my alibi has kept me off my feet and in flip-flops for a good part of this whole week. It has made me the butt of all the No Shoes, No Service jokes you can think of down at the tavern, the commentary from all the lonely buzzards who think a nightly meal consists of boiled peanuts and a six-pack of PBR, a few twists from the barmaid's orange supply. The doctor at the plant says I need to keep off my feet. Lay off the steak. And the salt. And the beer. The smokes, too. Tough orders, all of it. Last night even the TV was making me lonesome, so I stuffed my feet into my boots and tried to make it out there for their six-dollar steak and karaoke night. I love seeing all those women get up on the mini-stage, giving "Crazy" one last shot, Star Search-style, their guts heavy with meat. But the gravity of the swell settled into each foot, heavy like cement mob shoes. It made every step painful, if not impossible, to make. I never made it out the front door.

And now with the cops nosing around, asking if I know anything about my ex's stolen pickup, I'm glad I stayed close to home. The way they tell it, seems someone every day this week has moved her pickup to a different part of the lot down at the chicken factory. I laughed when they told me. Working at the same place as the ex has never been a picnic, but you hear lots of break room badmouthing and such, all sorts of things. So she'd have heard by now I was out with the gout, could barely walk anywhere, let alone drive her car to the far end of the lot, toss all her paperwork on the floor, and eat her plastic-wrapped lemon bars and hohos, and hobble home, undetected.

I guess it's only natural she'd name me a suspect, if only because things didn't go so well last week after our last so-called supply closet grudge fuck, when she told me she had in her purse the papers to make our split legal. Used to be in those golden, twenty-minute stretches, we could get back to the way we were, make good on those I Do Vows. And, after, we'd go right back to how we best function: apart. She'd revert to her hateful, manipulating ways, talking trash about me between drags in the smokeroom, me trying to reconcile what my heart knows with what my pecker feels. But this time she said she needed to move on, make it all legal, she'd pay for everything if I'd just sign. She had a pen and all. She wouldn't answer the Why Now question except to say she needed a clean break, whatever that is. Made me wish I'd have stopped long ago keeping an eye down the evisceration line for one of her over-the-shoulder glances that said—even with her latex gloves bloody with chicken livers, blonde hair back in a shower cap—to meet her in our secret place. And there we had together our last twenty minutes of marital bliss before she left me sitting on a plastic milk crate, pants unzipped and around my ankles, clutching a good thirty pages that would declare us no longer together.

So of course I broadcasted the news all over the plant. Of course the boys all felt my hangdog pain. Of course all the women who favor my ex tried to ignore me with a knowing eye-roll, and the others began to prospect me for their spinster cousins or for themselves. Then I heard later on the line that she'd met someone else for real, one of those Explorer SUV types, some lace-curtain motherfucker who listens to Mos Def and then goes back home to Country Club Lane.

And that's when my feet started to swell and I lost my balance and fell face down on a conveyor belt filled with chicken innards. That's when my blood pressure pills stopped working and no amount of meds could help me, and my feet blew up right there in the infirmary and the plant doctor sent me home for the rest of the week. And that's when her truck started moving from one spot in the parking lot to another, making her guess every night not only where her truck was, but who was moving it, and why. It was the perfect crime against her. Harmless, I guess, but frightening nonetheless, itching like none other could at her control freak tendency.

And I've been cursing this gout attack all week, but right now I'm grateful it's kept me from tangling with the law. I see the logic in her suspecting me—her husband—who knows her better than anyone else in this town, who might have a spare key somewhere and who knows what would get her most. Sometimes I go by her trailer and I'm glad for everything that happened, glad I saw early on the person she was. And other times when I drive by I feel like she must feel now, leaving the plant at five, thinking she knows just where she parked her truck, but then discovering it moved instead, unseen, by someone else who has the key to the truck and everything in it.

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