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Untitled Art

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"Do you have to go away again so soon?"

Marie’s voice slipped from pleading to grating. The sound drove Harry Mitchell crazy. And it was getting worse lately.

How could she expect him to enjoy being around her, let alone choose to postpone an important business trip when she sounded like that? A guy could hardly finish his breakfast.

"I really do have to go, honey," he said, getting up from the kitchen table and walking over to her at the stove. He ran his hand down her side and let it rest on her hip. She turned around and he flared to look into her eyes.

Oh, God, she’s going to try tears this time. Too bad, but that’s not going to change my mind. No way I’m going to pass up this trip. Not with Sandra waiting for me in Atlanta. No way I’m missing out on that bit of...southern hospitality.

"Harry! Why are you smiling? Do you think it’s funny that I’m going to miss you?"

Marie sobbed and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, honey, I’m sorry. No, it’s not funny." He drew her close, but she didn’t lower her arms and her elbows dug uncomfortably into his chest.

"It’s very, um...sweet," he went on. "I...it’s just...I was thinking...so how um...pretty you look and how lucky I am to have you..."

"Really? You really think I’m pretty?" She pulled her hands down a little and peeked up over her fingertips at him. Her eyes were puffy and black streaks of mascara were starting down her cheeks.

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She looked down and picked at a button on his shirt. "Well, I guess so..." She was actually laughing! "But you must see so many pretty girls when you travel. I always worry..."

Harry pulled her hands down and held one gently in each of his. "Oh, yeah, you bet." He arched his eyebrows and rolled his eyes to be sure she understood that this was just a joke. "A paper products sales rep runs into mostly movie stars and fashion models out on the road. So don’t be surprised when Julia Roberts calls, okay?"

Marie ducked her head and looked like she was trying not to grin.

"And you’d better not open all those perfumed envelopes I keep getting from Hollywood," Harry continued. "Those x-rated love letters will just make you feel worse."

Marie looked up at him, unable to hold back her smile. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him hard. Well, he thought, there’s something she doesn’t do very often.

"You’re such a tease, Harry," she laughed next to his ear. "Is that why I love you so much?"

"Could be, Julia. I mean Marie."

"Oh, you!" she giggled and hugged him even more.

He folded his arms around her and stared over her shoulder at the spice rack above the stove. Is she acting strange, he wondered, or am I really good at this?

Marie pulled back for a second, then leaned close again and gave him a kiss that made him stop wondering.

After a moment she pulled away and looked at the clock on the wall.

"Well, you better finish your breakfast if you have to catch that plane." She pulled a Kleenex from her apron pocket and dabbed at her eyes as she watched him sit back down. "But...are you sure you have to...oh, I’m sorry, Harry. I must sound like such a baby."

"No, no. That’s okay." He started to get up, but she waved him back.

"Better finish eating, sweetheart," she said.

He nodded and sat again, then reached across the table and slid the sports page out of the morning paper. "I’ll miss you, too, you know," he said. "And besides, aren’t you going to be busy with that class you’re taking?"

She hesitated, looked down at her feet and said, "Well, yes, it does take up quite a lot of my time when you’re away."