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Lynne

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Ciara Laing

He sits in the great room reading his favorite Stephen King book. The heat from the lively flame tickles his dress-socked toes. Dan closes his book and sits up rigidly in the purple velvet wingback chair. It was that smell, the stench of musty roses—the one he had had professionally cleaned out of everything made with a stitch of fabric.

Shit! Where is that smell coming from?

That musty rose hadn't stuck its thorns in his nostrils for seven months and sixteen days. That could only mean one thing.

"Oh, Daaaaannnn, I'm home!"

No. How?

"Dan, sweetie, I can't find my clothes. Why is my closet empty?"

He wasn't sure what he was going to do. Should he run? Call the cops? Hide? He sits there stiff as a dead old man. If he thought Lynne was crazy before he had her institutionalized, he was in for a real treat now.

Lynne had broken out of the institution only an hour ago, and they wouldn't realize that she was gone for at least another four hours when they did the midnight check. The pills they had been giving her were supposed to make her drowsy so she'd fall asleep fast, but she had been hiding them in the spots behind her back molars where her wisdom teeth used to be.

"Oh, I see, you thought you had gotten rid of me for good? Right sweetie?"

Dan doesn't answer. He hears the plunk of her heels descending the stairs. *Where did she get heels?* he thinks. He imagines some innocent lady walking home from work getting dragged to the ground and beaten nearly to death. He wouldn't put it past Lynne to beat a lady senseless and strip her of her clothes and belongings to blend in on the streets. **Plunk, plunk, plunk!** He knows he needs to move and quick.

He hurries quickly through the great room, then the dining room to get to the kitchen. He heads straight for the knife block. He grabs the biggest chopping knife in the block. As he sprints into the office, he catches his chunky reflection in the window.

Shit! I can't stab her. What the hell am I going to do?

Dan tries to breathe as shallowly as possible and listens carefully for Lynne's footsteps. Bullets of sweat drip off his balding head as he crouches behind his mahogany desk. He hears the heels on the wood floor, *she's in the great room*, and then the sound shifts to a harsher clicking, the tile... *she's walking across the kitchen floor*. Dan slides across his desk and runs for the stairs. *I can get to the phone upstairs, call the cops — they'll come get her.*

The stairs creak beneath his feet as he takes them two and three at a time. He trips three from the top and is greeted by the sound of a gun being cocked. He turns his head to see Lynne at the bottom of the stairs with his shotgun.

"Now Danny-Poo, why was this big gun in the coat closet? You weren't planning on shooting me were you?"

"No, no, it is just for protection...in case of robberies, break-ins, you know."

"No, I don't know! I think you were going to shoot me, you piece of shit!"

She quickly climbs the stairs and holds the gun inches from his face. "You were going to shoot me weren't you?" He looks away grasping the knife tightly; she still hasn't seen it. "Answer me! WEREN'T YOU?!"

CRACK! She smacks the barrel across his head, knocking him onto his side.

Looking up with blurry vision, he can see the rage in her ice gray eyes. The sound of her teeth grinding together makes his neck feel tight and pinched. He winces as she pushes the barrel closer to his face. *I have to cry. She always feels bad when I cry. One shot and my brains will be the new wall decor.* The tears start to flow freely.

"Please. I wasn't going to shoot you. I promise sweetie, I love you."

"You don't lock up people you love!" she screams as she

bounds up two stairs and kicks him in the center of his back.

"I'm sssorr...ry, pppp...lease, give meeee.. a chacha..chance, I love yyy..yooooou," he coughs and sobs uncontrollably.

Lynne loosens her stance and lowers the gun, letting it hang loosely in her right hand. "I'm sorry sweetie, come here," she says, left arm open wide.

Now! Dan lifts himself and puts all his force behind his right arm and drives the knife deep into her stomach. Lynne grasps the banister and eases herself into a sitting position. Her hand shakes as she slowly pulls the knife from her stomach. Blood spills down the front of her. "You son-of-a-bitch!" she shrieks.

Dan takes the gun and runs down the stairs into the dining room. *My cell phone is in my coat!* He dials 911 and walks back to the staircase; Lynne is gone.

"I am going to kill you," Lynne's voice echoes through the house.

"Screw you, you crazy bitch!" He walks past the stairs into the great room; the fire is blazing.

"AHHHHHHHHH! FUCK!" Dan screams as Lynne stabs the knife into the back of his shoulder three times. The muscles in his shoulder throb; nerves burn, fueling his anger. He turns and throws her to the floor in front of him, near the fire.

"Don't move! Keep your crazy ass right where it is!" he says as he cocks the shotgun.

"Screw you!" she spits at him and starts to get up, shaking and growing paler. The middle of the blue cashmere sweater she stole drips thick, dark drops of blood onto the tops of her bare feet.

"I'm serious, I will blow your nuts-o head off!"

"Yeah, sure thing, dick face!" she says with the knife clenched in her hand.

She begins to lunge and Dan fires the gun just to the right of her shoulder; she ducks to the ground. "Missed me!" she taunts. Pissed, Dan fires a shot into the ceiling. Lynne screams out in fear this time. She jumps up and runs straight at him, knife raised above her head. He cocks the gun, Click! "Damn it!" He jumps back, but it's too late; Lynne thrusts the knife into the center of his thigh.

"Crazy bitch!" he screams, grabbing her by the neck. He pushes her back and slams her head into the brick mantle of the fireplace. He pushes her into the fire, pulls the grate in front of it, and sits and holds it in place with his feet. He shoves his fingers in his ears and hums *Hush Little Baby* to himself.

Lynne wails and claws at the grate as the room fills with a shadowy smoke and a burning stench. It doesn't take long before her body falls limp. Dan scoots back, gets up, and walks out the front door.