Waiting on Good Vibrations

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LIVING ROOM

Mary picks up a bottle of J&B off the table, refills her drink, then sits back down on the sofa. The leather couch sticks to her skin like the dead cow is trying to hold on to her.

A staccato buzz startles Mary. She jumps, that stinking leather sticking to her skin for a split second, her scotch spilling onto Scotchgard cowhide.

New message from Sandra: “Any word yet?”
“No. Surgery should’ve been over half hour ago.”

Mary puts the phone down next to her scotch on the slab of glass that her husband called a coffee table. Pierre didn’t want the quilted maple or mahogany. He said they would stain. Meanwhile, this glass piece of shit is scratched to hell, but, by the grace of God, stain-free. Mary laments that the warranty expired fifteen years ago and wonders if her husband’s chest cavity is still cracked open.

The expression “rack of ribs” keeps popping into her head.

A long buzz from an unknown number.

“Hello?”
“Hi, Mary Lewis?”
“Yes? What? What is it?” says Mary

“Th-this is Ted, with Caribbean Cruise. Uh, When’s the last time you took a good vacation?”

“When’s the last time I took a good vacation?”

“Yes, ma’am,” says Ted.

“When was that, anyway? I guess a couple years ago Pierre and I went down to Corpus Christi, but it was only because his brother has a time-share.”

“Uh, ok. Have you ever been on a cruise before?”

“Actually, I’m getting another call.” She hangs up. She slouches back into the couch and sighs. “Son of a—”

bbzzzzzzzzzzzzzz bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb

This time Sandra’s calling.

“Hey, did everything go well?”

“I don’t know. Still, haven’t heard anything. You get my text?”

“Yeah, but that was almost fifteen minutes ago.”

“You’ll be the first person I call when I hear anything,” says Mary.
“Well, hang in there. You’ve got nerves of steel to handle this all by yourself in that big house.”

“My nerves aren’t steel; they’re just soaked in ethanol.” She takes another sip of J&B.

“Are you drinking? At nine in the morning?”

“Wouldn’t you be?” Mary says, chuckling. “My husband’ll be pronounced dead at any moment. Won’t even know I bought the scotch.”

“Don’t say that! I think you’ve had too much already.”

Mary looks at the bottle. A third of the liquor is gone.

“Not quite enough.”

Sandra sighs. “Mom won’t like that you’re drinking again, Mary.”

“Good for her. You gonna rat?”

“Jesus Christ. I wish y’all hadn’t moved out there. I could be by your side—”

“I don’t need an accountabillibuddy. I’ll call you when the doctor calls me. I need to keep this line clear.”

“Oh? Your cell phone doesn’t have call waiting?”

“Who knows?” Mary hangs up.

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The call comes after another hour and a few more drinks. Everything’s fine. Pierre’s stable as hell, and the best part? She can visit as soon as a few hours from now!

Dr. Stork sounds happy to have not killed his patient. Mary is trying not to be short with him; it’s his job to be happy about not killing patients.

“Surgery over. Everything ok,” she texts Sandra.

The phone is a different machine now. Mary no longer cares what might come through the network.

She begins to pace around the house.

KITCHEN

Cold linoleum and formica all the way around with an island counter with bar stools that no one sits in, not even Pierre, kept spic and span every day for twenty years. Damn, that’s five years past the mortgage! Smells great, like Pinesol. Fresh. The stove is some stainless steel block where a lot of dead turkeys and hams have gone to get juiced up for Pierre’s delicate palate.

HALLWAY

White carpet stretches out toward the bedroom door. There is a cabinet with drawers underneath it with towels and quilts, all matching red and soft and tucked into neat rows like pages of a cigarette-smelling romance novel.
BEDROOM

Mary has slept on the couch since Pierre’s hospitalization. The air in here is stale and dusty. There’s the bed, maroon sheets and blanket undisturbed. There are twin bedside tables with twin lamps—white porcelain cubes with no shades and silhouettes of naked women cut into the pottery let the light through. Mary imagined (not for the first time) what Pierre’s reaction would be if she replaced them with nearly identical lamps that let light shine through big phalluses instead of busty babes.

The closet door is open a crack, letting some darkness in to combat the lamplight. Mary opens it. Beneath the neatly pressed hanging shirts are six pairs of shoes and a gun safe.

On the bed, Mary strokes the barrel of Pierre’s favorite pistol, a Colt .45, while lying on her back. She looks at her reflection in the barrel. It’s obscene how carefully the gun has been polished. Mary’s lips leave a smudge, teeth clack against the cold steel and thumb pulls back the hammer. She smiles.

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The pistol, glossy and recently rubbed down with microfiber cloth (same kind Pierre uses for his glasses but marked up 500%), rests easy in the safe. The safe is in a closet next to a bed with maroon sheets. White carpet from the bedroom spills out into the hallway and bears the marks of a recent vacuuming.

Downstairs, a glass tips up, ice clinks. Scotch drains into Mary’s throat. There is that old warm sensation in her chest. She is pleasantly drunk as she serves her recovering husband dinner. There is a flash in her mind, a weird fusion of emotion and cold clarity, which she lets flow over her. She washes the remnants of that feeling away.

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