

Sunday Morning

Darcy would have to use someone's garage. For a moment she could see it, East Bay late-afternoon sunlight broken by grime on the small high window. There would be cobwebs. She wondered, what garage was this in her little dream? Perhaps one she'd hidden in as a young girl, in some place they hadn't lived long. A strong curl of gasoline smell. But there wouldn't be that, would there?

Chet Baker sang like velvet from the CD player she'd moved into the kitchen.

"I may dream a million dreams

But how can they come true?"

Darcy Marie Jenkins loved Chet Baker ever since Mikey played him on that jukebox, Valentine's Day, their wedding day eighteen months ago. How could he sound so perky and sad at the same time? She had played horn in the high school band for two years, could kind of feel it in her fingers when she listened. The afternoon of their wedding Darcy played a little video poker, and they drank

Heinekens. Mikey couldn't keep his hands off her, and she didn't want him to. Darcy touched her cheek. She had won three hundred dollars.

And just like that, it's all she was thinking about. Darcy knew that was the first step, the first question they asked about in treatment, *do you ever lose time?* But she could see the playing cards on the screen, feel the push back of keys on her fingertips even as they drummed on the papers Mikey had left on the Formica. Her other hand was tight around the morning coffee cup, shaking slightly. An orange, unpeeled, between them. Darcy looked at her hands. Wow, wrinkles even on her fingers. Forty years old, she was twenty when her mom was forty, she never thought she'd get there. Fifty bucks on the Mets over the Yankees, paid off fifty-nine in profits. Five of that, and she could see Mikey's eyebrows arch as he looked at the check, her helping with the rent after all.

Darcy washed out her coffee cup and poured water into the purple plastic bowl for Cleo, her black toy poodle, who slurped at it. They had lived here for a year. The apartment cost three times as much as in Oregon, but Mikey said they had to go. A re-start, as if life were a web page that could be refreshed with a click. Ends almost met because Mikey had work; people repaired their houses in

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recessions. And Darcy worked. But they never knew when she would spend more than they made. Still, they had two bedrooms separated by a wall so thin that Darcy was sometimes embarrassed by the night sounds from her fifteen year old step-son's room, but it was clean and the neighbors, even though she didn't actually know them to speak of, were nice and almost all of them, she thought, from somewhere else, too. Darcy placed the yellow coffee mug upside-down to dry on a kitchen towel.

Almost ten in the morning. Church in twenty-five minutes, and she had to get dressed. A month ago and it would have been enough time to place a few bets. But Mikey had changed all the passwords and she couldn't get to the Internet gambling sites from home anymore. Her office was only twenty minutes the other way, but then booting up, logging on ... Darcy shook her head as she thought of someone finding the twelve-step list she'd taped to the inside of her desk drawer. Under all the pencils. She sighed and pulled pants and a clean white shirt on and messed some with her blond hair so that it looked like she'd just exercised, she knew she still looked that fit. She'd look for a garage along the way.

The Community Church of Joy was two years old but already had twelve thousand members. If you got to the

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sanctuary early enough you could get within twenty rows and watch the preacher in-person rather than on a video screen. Darcy had spoken to him twice, but she felt he had the same smile for everyone.

She walked past the sixteen bright basketball courts and the McDonalds and KFC where teenagers were prepping to open. The preacher said everyone was so proud that they had the biggest Megachurch west of the Mississippi. Darcy glanced at the Jumbotron above the entry to the sanctuary. Forty groups and activities today. She had attended the one for addictive personalities once, which cemented her preference for online support chat rooms. On the Internet you didn't have to worry about seeing *screenname: George* later while you huddled over the ATM at Safeway.

The sermon was nice and she loved the slightly funkified songs of the three hundred-person choir. Afterwards Darcy went to the Fellowship Hall for those with last names between H and L and had a donut and coffee and chatted with a nice couple that came to the Church all the way from south of Sacramento, almost a hundred miles each way! They spent all Sunday here, the kids at the activity centers, lunch, the movie complex and, soon, the water park with the Jonah laser-light show. The woman's hair was very straight and she had glasses; the gentleman looked like a runner.

They all complained about the cost of housing and the gentleman remarked that each week's offerings must be almost one hundred thousand dollars, which nearly set Darcy's mind off on a gambler's jag. She drank one Styrofoam cup of coffee. They looked at her with what she felt was envy when she told them she lived close enough to walk to the Church, then they told her how big their house was in Sacramento, it sounded to Darcy like a castle, and he was a radiologist. "Space is now, like, a nonissue for us," the woman had smiled at her, and Darcy thought, they would have nothing to talk about with Mikey except maybe repair work he could do for them, and after a while they didn't talk to each other any more.

On the way home Darcy noted the neon sign over the handicapped-parking garage for the sanctuary. Pigeons circled darkly about the opening. Then Darcy pictured a Brinks truck in there, picking up the offering cash and she thought, you could hack the Church's web site and probably get the deposit schedule and then she felt badly because that was another step; *have you ever thought about something illegal to finance gambling?* She stopped at the 7/11 around the block from her home and bought a box of dog biscuits.

At the apartment Cleo pushed her nose into the food bowl, uncurious at its early bounty. Darcy suddenly felt that she would like to chat with *patsytrue* from one of the online rooms, after sharing stories about their problems they were virtually friends, almost. But Darcy would have to get to the office and if she was on line then certainly she'd have to take some time at the Prestige Casino site. And after all trying to stop that was why they had to move from Oregon, and the fact that Darcy could not stop was, finally, the whole point.

Darcy took the Vicodin with orange juice and after a few more minutes, drove the Toyota back toward the church. She yawned at the stoplight before turning right into the vacant handicapped-parking garage. It took her a few minutes to organize the paraphernalia. Then Darcy slid the CD into the player.

She yawned again, and looked at the empty pill case on the cracked black dashboard. Seventy-five dollars from an online pharmacy without a real prescription, a good savings, there. She saw the family photo on the seat next to her, the three of them at Great America.

Chet Baker sang again and Darcy thought, how lovely his voice is. Someone told her once that at the end of his

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life his voice cracked and collapsed. Heroin, she thought she remembered. He was an addict, too.

"Don't change your hair for me...

Not if you care for me..."

Through half-open eyes, she saw the papers Mikey had left on the kitchen table that Sunday morning, now neat beneath the photo on the seat. Divorce proceedings. Sentences about the fifty thousand dollars she'd lost gambling, the two bankruptcy filings.

Darcy's grip on the front of her favorite soft white shirt began to slip. She saw the check crisply clipped to the papers. Three thousand dollars. The Mets had beaten the Yankees.

"My funny valentine."

Her own note on top of the check, the letters swimming as her head nodded back, the calm darkening around her.

"For the rent."

The End