

Rocked

Fifty kilos are about the same as 110 pounds. Bolin knew how to convert it because he'd been fishing in Mexico for fifteen years. He could buy things in pounds, like coffee or shrimp, but weighing the biggest fucking Grouper he ever caught had to be done in metric.

Bolin caught a fish that weighed more than his wife, Gina. The woman who he considered to be the love of his life. The woman who now was giving him strong hints of an oncoming divorce, even though she was almost four months pregnant.

He was stunned by their last conversation; shocked by the understanding that his perfect life was threatened, that his future might not be all beer and Mexican sunsets. A splice of Gina's last declaration stayed with him, played in his brain like the opening line to a nursery rhyme – *I thought I really loved you.*

Bolin's main distraction from his escalating troubles with Gina was fishing.

In Mexico.

He learned how to fish from his grandpa. Back in Indiana with a can of earthworms and a five dollar rod and reel, on the deep side of Eagle Creek reservoir. Fishing in Mexico was different. If reservoir fishing was a bicycle, deep sea fishing was a Harley Davidson.

During the winter months, when his HVAC business was slow, Bolin would drive across the border and spend long weekends taking friends, or friends of friends out on the Sea of Cortez. In the beginning of their marriage, he'd ask Gina if she wanted to go. He soon found out that fishing was not her thing. He stopped asking years ago.

Since dawn that Friday, Bolin had been floating on his boat with his cousin Ray who worked at a metal fabricating company in Tempe. Ray was also an army veteran. He could handle life without luxuries. But it was Bolin who was the supreme expert at roughing it. He knew the northern part of Mexico like the interior of his living room and the Sea of Cortez was his treasure map. Bolin knew the best fishing spots were Three Mile and the Estuary and around a rocky piece of land that was so covered in bird shit that from a distance, it looked like an iceberg. Still Bolin regretted leaving for Mexico after that last tense conversation with Gina. Even if he did make a promise to take Ray before the scorching summer set in, he should've cancelled the trip. He should've told Ray they'd go another time.

Still, on this perfect blue sky morning, Bolin hadn't caught anything special. Not yet. Probably because he was distracted by the realization that Gina was going to leave him. That Gina, the love of his life, probably didn't love him anymore. When he returned to their home in Phoenix, she said they needed to talk.

I thought I really loved you.

Ray had inconveniently appeared at that moment, stepping out of his fifteen year old car, leather gym bag in hand. He strolled up the sidewalk and rang the doorbell.

Bolin ignored the sound and said, "What does that mean? You thought you really loved me? Are you saying that you don't love me now?"

"Can we talk about this at a time when Ray is not ringing the doorbell?" Gina said. "When you get home from Mexico?"

Final straw was coming, he thought. She was going to hit him with a hard, razor sharp, final straw.

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Bolin got a big bite mid-morning before slack tide but wasn't fast enough, and the fish took the bait to the bottom, under the rocks.

"You got rocked," Ray said, while removing his wide brimmed hat to wipe sweat off his shaved bald head.

"Yeah. Damn."

A disappointment. Bolin was hoping to catch a few Groupers. His favorite.

"You're distracted," Ray said. "I can tell."

"Yeah."

Bolin left it at that. He didn't think it was the place or time to tell Ray he could be on the verge of divorce. That Gina was ready to walk out of his life for good and he desperately wanted to figure out how to stop her. That she saw him as a self-centered, irresponsible man-child, asking her to have his child and spend the next two decades of her life raising him - a boy, Bolin hoped. A tough little kid he could teach how to fish and maneuver a boat and wheel a truck over the bumpy, dried-mud roads of rural Mexico. Gina was going for an ultrasound next week and he would know for sure. Bolin decided not to tell Ray all that shit right now. Anyway, they were there to fish. Maybe his last fishing trip for a while.

After the big bite, Bolin caught only three other fish: two Roosterfish and a smallish Sierra.

Ray wasn't as lucky. He caught a small Grouper, and a Sea Lion fought him for it. All Ray reeled in was a fish head and a bit of spine.

Bolin got another bite, and thought he got rocked again. He soon understood he had something heavy on his line and from the feel of it, he was in for a long, violent fight. Bolin

drew the line, tightened the drag, reeled furiously, and jerked the line until his arms grew tired, and his fingers cramped.

Finally, Ray said, "I see color."

Bolin saw it too and had to take a breath. The fish was huge.

"That's a fucking dinosaur," Ray said.

The fish made a last tired run and went under the boat, pulling Bolin's line vertical. He pulled back and waited him out.

After five more minutes of reeling and jerking, Bolin finally brought the fish to the top of the water. Ray hooked a gaff behind one of the monster's sharp-edged gills. Ray helped Bolin pull it onto the floor of the boat.

Bolin put his line down, unhooked the fish, and stared at it for a minute as it lay prone and exhausted, weakly flopping on the floor of his boat. It was fucking huge. Shades of beige and brown in a camouflage pattern over its wide body. No teeth, just a big vacuum-like mouth. He pushed it into the boat cooler, massaged his cramping fingers and cracked his knuckles.

A moment later, he took an open bottle of Dos Equis from Ray. The coldness felt good against his sore hands.

"To my giant, fucking fish," he said grinning, and took a drink.

"To the dinosaur," Ray declared and took a long swig from his bottle.

Bolin finished his beer and looked at his watch. The morning had switched to afternoon. Bolin opened the boat cooler again and admired his fish.

They were pulled into the bay connected to a launcher that Bolin called a high rider, steered by Bolin's old friend Alvaro who lost his variety store last year when the cartel burned it

down. Bolin knew his friend was hurting financially, so he paid him twenty dollars above the usual charge and twenty more for filleting and preserving his catch in plastic bags.

Bolin wouldn't have his prize cut up, though. Not until he got home to show his Phoenix friends. And Gina. If it wasn't too late.

He asked Alvaro to weigh the fish on his big, old fashioned scale. Fifty kilos. Ray pulled out his cell and took pictures of the Grouper hanging on a hook, next to Bolin.

Ray helped him heave the fish into Bolin's huge Maxcold Igloo cooler. Bolin loaded the cooler on the back of his old Chevy Silverado, arranged the baggies of fish filets around the big-ass Grouper and closed the cooler lid. Then he opened the lid again and looked at his fish. He'd never caught a fish that big. No one that he took out fishing ever caught a fish that big. No one.

Bolin drove down to the icehouse and paid one hundred pesos to have the fish covered with shaved ice. After the cooler was filled, it was loaded back onto his truck-bed and locked down using a hooked bar and a mount.

After they got to Highway 8 both of them grew silent. Ray stared at the road ahead, coming down from his two day beer buzz, as Bolin drove a cut above the speed limit lost in his own thoughts about all the things he needed to tell Gina. How he had to convince her not to leave him, even though the final straws had been blowing loose for some time.

I thought I really loved you-

Bolin drove the dusty desert road to his home in Gilbert, on the outskirts of Phoenix. Ray said goodbye, got in his faded paint car and left.

Bolin pulled into his garage and came into the house. Gina was gone but her SUV was still there.

He went to the bathroom and saw droplets of blood on the floor tiles and a tiny smear of blood on the toilet seat.

Bolin pulled out his cell. The thing was dead. He'd forgotten to take his charger and over the weekend the cell had lost its charge. He rushed to the bedroom, found his charger still lying on the nightstand and plugged in his phone. He waited and paced until it was charged enough to work. When he was able to call Gina's cell, no one answered. He saw on his phone that he'd missed three calls from her.

He went to his voice mail. The first one was Gina. He listened.

"I'm having a problem, Bo. I'm spotting blood. Please come home as soon as you can."

He listened to the second one, which was an hour later. Gina's voice sounded more stressed.

"I need to go to the hospital. Call me back soon."

The third one.

"I'm at Phoenix Memorial They're telling me I'm having a miscarriage. Please call back."

Bolin hit her number again but no answer. He called Ruthie with the puffed up lips and the spidery fake eyelashes, who was Gina's best friend. Ruthie didn't answer either.

Finally, Gina called him again. In a broken voice, she told him that she tried to get hold of him, and his phone went straight to voice mail and why didn't he listen to her messages. Gina had to call Ruthie to drive her to the ER.

Bolin raced to the hospital and saw Ruthie sitting in the waiting room reading texts on her phone. When she spied Bolin, she pursed her billowy lips and squinted up at him from behind her mink hair eyelashes.

"Oh you finally showed up," she said, as she grabbed her purse and stood up.

"Tell Gina, to call me if she needs anything."

Ruthie walked toward the door, stopped, and said, “She deserves better.”

Bolin ignored her and asked the receptionist if he could see his wife. A nurse took him back to a hospital room where Gina sat on a bed, looking heartbroken. He went to hug her, and she let him, but she didn’t hug back.

“I’m sorry,” Bolin said. “I’m really sorry about this.”

Bolin tried to hug her again, and again she didn’t respond.

“My phone was dead. I didn’t get your calls until I got home.”

He went back to the waiting room, bought two bottles of water out of the vending machine, and returned to Gina. He tried to hand a bottle to her and she pointed to a plastic pitcher of water and a plastic cup sitting on a bedside table. He took a seat in an uncomfortable chair while she sat on the bed, and together they waited while Bolin professed his regret and apologies for not being there, for letting his cell go dead, for the terrible end of her three and half month pregnancy.

Gina barely responded to his pleas for forgiveness, accepting his apologies with soft generic words, like “okay” and “I know” and “sure.” Shaking her head no when he said maybe they could try again when she was ready.

Gina was finally released to go home, and they emerged from the hospital to a red sky sunrise. The ride back was mostly silent, with Gina wiping away quiet tears.

Then she whispered something so low that he barely heard her. Four words.

“It was a boy.”