

Diamonds Are a Woman's Best Friend

1
2 I poked at the pathetic spread of my thighs and tried to figure out if the fat dimples
3 formed a pattern. Maybe Orion's Belt, or the interchange at the turnpike and 77. I did this
4 most mornings, sitting on the edge of my bathtub, just before tweezing the dark hairs out of
5 the mole on my chin.

6 It wasn't always like this, but I'm staring down the big 5-0 in just a couple of weeks. My
7 body broadcasts the truth, from the drooping bits to the aching ones, no matter what I do.
8 Some mornings it just takes me longer to surrender.

9 Today I was interrupted by the trash truck roaring past my bathroom window. Its
10 brakes squealed a couple of houses down. The expected bangs and thumps followed, but
11 also an unexpected smash. The garbage men were shouting—cursing, I felt sure—in Span-
12 ish. I quit my morning remediation and peered out the window.

13 That's when I saw him.

14 He was making pretty good time up the sidewalk, slowed down by the right-left, right-
15 left swaying motion of his blocky shoulders. He wore pink plaid shorts with tall black knee
16 socks and sandals. His gut sat wide and tall under a tight polyester shirt with a fat, floppy
17 collar.

18 Lionel? How could *he* be Lionel? And why was my husband dressed like Ted Knight in
19 *Caddy Shack*? Walking past *our* house, on *our* street, when he had left in his truck an hour
20 ago?

21 Then *he* turned, revealing his profile: hawkish nose, glasses, Adam's apple poking out
22 way too far. How could anyone looking like that NOT be Lionel?

23 I barreled out the screen door to catch him. My bare feet slapped across the street and
24 down the sidewalk.

25 At last I was in arm's distance and caught his shoulder.

26 "What the hell are you doing, crazy man?"

27 But he was NOT Lionel—a bewildered old man, his eyes wide and shocked, tottered on
28 his feet and struggled to keep his balance. He raised the stranger danger alarm.

29 “Help! Help! This lady! She’s, she’s, she’s —I don’t know her!”

30 The garbage truck’s BEEP, BEEP, BEEP drowned him out, for the most part.

31 “I’m sorry,” I said. “You’re just like my Lionel. Lionel Dufresne. You’re not, though. I
32 mean, you’re not my husband.”

33 He threw up his arms and yelled louder. “What do you want? Leave me alone. Get back.
34 Back!”

35 He whirled away, tripped on a crack in the sidewalk, and landed in a tangle, his glasses
36 hanging precariously from one ear. He scrambled his arms and legs, trying to right himself.
37 He gasped for air. No progress.

38 I offered my hand and steadied him to standing. When he was standing, it was obvious
39 he had scraped his cheek and hand, worked himself up into a semi-lather.

40 “Uh, you gonna be ok? You’re not looking so good,” I said. He needed a band-aid or two,
41 for sure. “I’ll get you fixed up. Come with me.”

42 I tugged on his elbow. He grunted, he glared, but he also walked.

43

44 We were sitting on more-gray-than-white plastic chairs in my driveway. He wouldn’t
45 get any closer to my house.

46 “Not sure what’s behind your doors,” he had muttered and planted his sneakers firmly
47 in the cement driveway. I got the chairs out and brought him some ice water in a Missouri
48 State Fair cup, but he side-eyed it. “Water?” He sniffed, turned away.

49 For my second attempt, I came back with a tray loaded with a damp cloth, bandages,
50 duct tape, and a can of cold Bud.

51 He grabbed the Bud, held it to his scraped cheek, then popped it open and guzzled. He
52 downed another healthy swig and smacked his lips.

Diamonds Are a Woman’s Best Friend

53 I sipped at the rejected ice water and tried to justify myself.

54 "You just look so much like my husband, Lionel. I overreacted, I guess? When I saw you?
55 Lionel left this morning. I watched him go. But then— he was there, on our sidewalk."

56 He snorted and gave me a top-down once-over with beady black eyes. "What a crock of
57 shit. Really? Your husband looks like me?" True, Lionel didn't wear knee socks. That was a
58 major difference. "Only way he'd look like me was if you hitched yourself to a geezer, and
59 that there is a sugar daddy set-up." He raised his eyebrows at me and waited. *Very* patiently.

60 The implication, the fixed stare, flustered me. I stuttered. "Huh-uh, mister. No sugar
61 daddy at this address. No. Sugar mama--maybe."

62 I bit my lower lip. Now I'd gone and done it. I'd never before let that secret pass my lips,
63 not even to Shelly, my sister.

64 Had he heard me? I couldn't tell. The old man just stared down the driveway.

65 "What's your name, anyway?" he eventually asked.

66 "Lorna," I told him.

67 He was Major Tom, he said. "Because I'm not minor."

68 "So you're a sugar mama, Lorna. Haven't met myself one a-those before."

69 We were a rare breed, true, and we tended to fly under the radar. Not as proud of our-
70 selves as those geezers with T-and-A pulling them along by their you-know-whats.

71 "Goodrich," I said, "was very good to my father and his father. In school they called my
72 sister and me, The Rubber Princesses." Not my favorite nickname ever.

73 He took a pull from his beer and spilled some on the crest of his belly mountain. "Rub-
74 ber money alone doesn't explain why you attack old guys in the street, does it."

75 "No, Major," I said. "It's Lionel! He's pushing me to the brink, talking on the phone in the
76 study at 2 in the morning, disappearing in his truck for hours at a time."

77 I'd checked the truck, and he'd put a couple thousand miles on it since August. Not at all
78 like him—even more worrying, it was clean and a pine tree air freshener hung from the
79 rearview mirror. Who was he trying to impress?

80 I'd snuck downstairs and hovered around the study in the night and could have sworn I
81 heard phone sex. Or maybe it was Lionel enjoying the heck out of two scoops of Moose
82 Tracks ice cream.

83 "Lionel," I'd said, "I miss you, honey darling. Where are you going in that truck all the
84 time? Can't be anything better than this sugar at home."

85 He'd sighed dramatically. "Lorna, don't hassle me. I got stuff to take care of."

86 Yeah, probably *taking care of* jail bait.

87 I wasn't about to tell Major Tom the whole backstory. "Major Tom, I don't even know
88 you from Adam."

89 "Get me another Bud," he said. "And get yourself one."

90

91 Three beers later, the empties were dribbling weakly into the grass. Pretty sure Major
92 Tom was feeling no pain. I wasn't.

93 I'd told him the whole story, every godawful bit.

94 I belched at the end. "So I'm hung up on him, and he's stepping out on me with some
95 floozy who's too young for hormonal mood swings. I bet she can text with her thumbs. You
96 know, holding the phone sideways?" Sheer humiliation.

97 I don't know what I expected Major Tom to say. Maybe he wasn't even listening. I
98 couldn't bear to make eye contact.

99 Then Major Tom wobbled up onto his feet and started fumbling with his zipper.

100 What. The. Hell?

101 "Pisser. Need a pissar," he mumbled.

102 He wobbled forward, backward. Was he going to hit the decks for the second time that
103 morning?

104 “It’s definitely not here,” I said. I grabbed him by the forearm and pulled him toward the
105 back door. I wanted no part of this *al fresco* fun.

106 We made it into the kitchen—the hall bath was in sight—the floor was still dry—when
107 my world went dark and I landed on my ass.

108
109 Best I could tell, when I came to, my ass was in one of the rickety dining room chairs my
110 grandmother loved so much. My wrists and ankles were tied up, must have been to the
111 arms and legs of the chair—I was sitting straight up. Whatever had been thrown over my
112 head was gagging me with woolly bits and foot odor.

113 Then I felt a burning swell rise up from my cheeks, spreading out over my hairline, and
114 then down my legs, my back. Crap, a hot flash. I jerked my wrists. No use: I couldn’t fan my-
115 self, or pull away from the seat, or make like a starfish with my arms and legs. One of those
116 usually worked.

117 Sweat beaded on my forehead and ran down my back. The crooks of my knees were
118 slick.

119 There was no end in sight, just fiery heat radiating off my skin. Desperation. Growls,
120 barks, jerks—my body and voice out of control, loud, jerking, angry. Finally I found words.
121 “Take this blanket off my head. Get! It! Off! Arrrrghhh!”

122 Then I screamed bloody murder and bucked against the chair.

123 Fresh, cool air suddenly broke over my head and cheeks, licking at my sweaty patches.
124 Blessed relief. Even my closed eyelids caught air and were balm to my suffering. When I
125 looked up, Major Tom was holding the plaid afghan from the living room couch and looking
126 spooked.

127 Behold the power of perimenopause. Sadly my clothes were too moist for me to glory in
128 it.

129 “Shut your pie hole—” Major Tom was trying to regain the upper hand “—unless you
130 want to tell me where your mama’s diamonds are.”

131 The ceiling fan was spinning around and around. So this was a robbery. I lifted my face
132 to catch the puffs of air. How did Major Tom even know about the rocks?

133 Major Tom was now talking on a cell phone in the dining room. “Is it ham on rye? Be-
134 cause I’m allergic to rye. You ought to know that.” He snapped the front window blinds shut.
135 “All right then. Just get here.” He hung up and approached.

136 “Diamonds. Shouldn’t be that hard, lady.” He jeered. “If you don’t tell me, you’ll be tell-
137 ing the next guy who comes in that door, I promise you.”

138 A few minutes later I heard a motor in the driveway and the thud of a slamming car
139 door.

140 Major Tom opened the back door, and in walked Lionel, looking ever so manicured,
141 crisp, and freshly showered in Bermuda shorts and a festive Hawaiian shirt. Geez, I wanted
142 to slap him.

143 The two men crossed to stand in front of me, shoulder to shoulder.

144

145 I swiveled my eyes between the men facing me in disbelief. On my left, a more wrinkled,
146 heavier, and greyer version of Lionel. Or, if you like, on my right a lighter, fresher-faced ver-
147 sion of Major Tom.

148 Major Tom cackled and elbowed Lionel. “Look at Lorna’s face. She’s losing her ever-lov-
149 ing mind.” He laughed again. “Get it yet, Lorna? We’ll wait.”

150 Father and son—a thieving familial gang. Maybe more a duo than a gang, but still. You
151 get my point.

152 Their stupid, self-satisfied faces nauseated me. “Lionel, I thought you were cheating on
153 me, you son of a bitch. Looks like you’ve just been scheming with your good-for-nothing
154 daddy. Should’ve known you couldn’t catch yourself a girlfriend.”

155 Pulling a pistol from his waistband, Lionel put it to my temple and said, “I’m not here to
156 chat about Cara. Tell me where the Rubber Queen’s diamonds are.”

157 “They’re in Mama’s Bible, right there on the front table. In Judges. There’s that hole cut
158 out?” The Royal Crown bag, rolled up snugly, was tucked in there.

159 He rolled his eyes in disgust. “Lorna, I know you moved them. You think I haven’t
160 looked there? That Bible’s got no more stuffing than a Thanksgiving turkey on Black Friday.
161 You better start singing a song with some truth in it.”

162 Shit, I’d love to say I had an inkling things were going south and had moved the jewels
163 to a clever hiding spot that Lionel knew nothing about—or better, yet, a secret safety de-
164 posit box in a bank in another state—but I’d be lying. I had no memory of moving anything,
165 anywhere. Any time. Period.

166 “Cough it up, Lorna. Where are the jewels?” The metal of the gun was hard and cold
167 against my skin, oddly satisfying.

168 Had I moved the jewels? Wow. I wracked my brain—nothing. Not one thing but regret
169 that I never took a CogniPower supplement or kept my brain agile by playing online train-
170 ing games for just five minutes a day.

171 The humiliation of aging pissed me off, maybe as much as the gun. Just when I needed
172 to outwit Lionel, to save my own skin, biology reared its ugly head.

173 Desperate, I said, “They’re in your sock drawer, the back.” *Could* they be in his sock
174 drawer? Doubtful. I seldom opened that stink swamp willingly.

175 Nonetheless, Lionel and Major Tom took the bait with disgusting excitement, their feet
176 pounding the wooden hallway. I heard what must have been the sock drawer slide out and

177 hit the floor. I imagined them pawing through the stained and mismatched socks like dogs
178 digging for bones.

179 I heard another drawer fall down. "You got any socks in this one?" Major Tom asked.

180 Would they find anything, and what would they do to me if they didn't? And, last but
181 not least, how big of a mess were they making?

182 I wriggled my wrists, straining the duct tape to its limits. No dice--the chair creaked,
183 though. I pushed my butt cheeks side to side, finding considerable play in the frame. I could
184 encourage the chair toward collapsing, especially with the extra ten in the hips I'd collected
185 since winter.

186 Lionel returned from ransacking his dresser, pistol hanging from his right hand. Time
187 to leverage my ass and anger.

188 "Lionel, what's that over there?" I jerked my chin toward the window.

189 "Huh?"

190 "Over there!" I repeated with a more emphatic jerk. "Poking out of the sideboard. Some-
191 thing purple."

192 Lionel's eyes lit up. He whirled around, back to me, so he could investigate.

193 Gauging my adrenaline levels, I flexed my forearms. I summoned a measure more rage,
194 which wasn't hard. I just thought about Lionel at our wedding, promising ever-so-earnestly
195 that he would love me forever.

196 I closed my eyes, breathed in, and roared. Pushed, arms and legs straining toward the
197 four corners of the room, praying for the chair joints to give way. With two distinct cracks,
198 the seat separated from the back and legs, and I was taped to the chair remnants and strug-
199 gling toward Lionel.

200 He gaped over his shoulder at me. "What the hell?" he said.

201 I probably looked like a mutant turtle with a scalloped dining room chair back for a
202 shell. As soon as I was close enough, I swung my arms up, over my head, and down with all
203 my pent-up rage.

204 My lethal elbows landed on air, missing all parts of Lionel, but when I belly flopped onto
205 the floor, *thump*, there he was next to me. I must have knocked him off balance on the way
206 down.

207 I flipped on to my turtle back and windmilled my arms and legs around. At least he
208 wouldn't be able to touch me; at best, I would knock him out cold.

209

210 When I reached panting exhaustion, I stopped, looked around, and listened. Lionel's
211 truck was no longer in the driveway: the Dufresne Boys were gone. The duct tape and wood
212 bits were slowing me down, so I headed to the kitchen for a decent pair of scissors. Just af-
213 ter I *snip-snipped*, I glimpsed it: the Royal Crown bag, turned inside out on the counter next
214 to an open butter cookie tin.

215 I threw the empty bag across the room. Damn! That's where the Rubber Dynasty Jewels
216 had been hidden. By me. I sucked in so many ways.

217 The police station would have to be the next stop.

218

219 I stormed in the tiny brick building and approached the front counter. The receptionist
220 smiled. "Sure is a nice day, isn't it?"

221 I huffed. "Sun might be shining, honey, but it's not helping me none."

222 I swear she smiled harder.

223 "What can we do you for?"

224 "Theft, best I can tell. You got any citations or such for assholery?"

225

226 That sure wiped her smile away and lit a fire under her butt. She left and came back
227 with Donald Crawl. I babysat him when I was in high school. His mama liked to go to
228 Pokey's and line dance. I tried to block out my memories of changing his diaper.

229 "Hey, Lorna. Misty here tells me you have a criminal complaint."

230 "Complaining, I'm not. I'm just telling you the facts: Lionel and his evil-twin daddy tied
231 me up and took Mama's diamonds this morning."

232 Donald adjusted his fat black belt and took out a notepad for the details.

233 "Was this anything like the lady with the maroon leather handbag who was stalking you
234 last Christmas? Or would you say it is more like the unidentified male who was emptying
235 out your birdfeeder without authorization? That's the last couple we got."

236 "This is totally different. I was minding my own business, inside." Assessing the current
237 condition of my legs. "Working on my work—you know, like you do—when I looked out
238 and saw Lionel out there, dressed like an old man, and I went to see what the heck he was
239 up to, and then I pushed him over, and then he drank a bunch of beers, tried to use my
240 driveway as a porta potty, attacked me, and duct taped me to a chair. Then Lionel showed
241 up, and one of them, either Major Tom or Lionel, took my Mama's diamonds. And now that
242 Lionel is stepping out on me, and taking up with his no-count daddy to boot, I want my dia-
243 monds back. But I don't want Lionel back."

244 Don wasn't writing a word, just staring at me with suppressed chuckles pressed into his
245 jowly cheeks. My words hung in the air, echoed, and grew bigger and more outlandish.

246 Don finally asked, "Should I write 'stolen diamonds' or 'duct taped to chair' in the report
247 first?"

248 "Who cares what the report says! Don't sit here and write a report! Go out there and
249 find Major Tom and Lionel! They're the ones you got to watch. They're the ones out there
250 running amok."

251 "So, Lionel's name should come first?" He adjusted his wire rim glasses.

Diamonds Are a Woman's Best Friend

252 "Never mind." I walked out. Taking care of thievery would be up to me. And Shelly.

253

254 Shelly's not one to mince words.

255 "I can't believe it! That no-good asshole! I knew he was going to mess up big, but this is
256 huge. Geez, Lorna, you sure know how to pick them."

257 Sitting in my car outside the police station, I had punched in the numbers for my sister.

258 Now we were putting our heads together at my house.

259 I said, "I wish I'd never met him, Shelly. You think I don't? Thing is, I need you. We can't
260 let those two puncture our Goodrich pride. We need a counterattack."

261 "Can't argue with that," said Shelly. "Turn on *Matlock* so I can think."

262 Luckily the den had survived in nearly original condition, so cleared up a little debris
263 and settled in for the boob tube's soothing effect. Didn't take long for a zen-like state to de-
264 scend on us. There's something about Andy Griffith in a light-colored suit that sets your
265 mind free from its troubles.

266 "I got to understand Lionel better, see inside his innermost desires," said Shelly, head-
267 ing toward his bathroom. Everyone knows that the truth about a person is in the medicine
268 cabinet, or at least near it, hence the line for the bathroom at most parties. Maybe I had re-
269 fused to share with Lionel so that I could avoid the infidelity signaled by new lotions, tonics,
270 pills, and gels.

271 Rattling, slamming, and rustling carried from down the hall. Then a victorious "woo
272 hoo!" and Shelly returned, carrying something limp, hairy, and brown.

273 "What'd you find?" I asked.

274 "Must be Lionel's spare rug," she said. "At first I thought it was a squirrel."

275 We sniggered. "Think his millennial floozy knows about his rugs?" I said. If I had any
276 luck, his would fall off just as they were getting busy.

277 Shelly didn't answer right away, just stared at the hair rodent.

Diamonds Are a Woman's Best Friend

278 But suddenly her eyes lit up, and she said, "That's an excellent question, Lorna. Don't
279 you think she *ought* to know?"

280 Smugness was just oozing out her pores..

281 "Ye-s-s-s," I said, unsure.

282 "Wouldn't you want to know if you had to take extra, shall we say, precautions with
283 your hunka—hunka burning love? Like not turning on the ceiling fan too high?"

284 I had no idea what she meant. "Yeah, I suppose."

285 "And do you think that Lionel has advised his girlfriend? The way we would?"

286 "Nooooooo," I said.

287 "How much do you think it's worth to Lionel to tell her in his own way, if and when he
288 chooses?"

289 All the pieces of Shelly's puzzle fell into place. I looked at Shelly, and we busted out
290 snickering like a couple of preteen boys.

291 "Oh, I think it's worth some diamonds. Lionel would definitely want to be the one to
292 break the news—or not," I said. "Let's make him that offer."

293 Shelly was already digging around in her shapeless shoulder bag for her keys. "Where
294 we going?"

295 "He could be anywhere," I said. "But I know the one guy who can narrow it down."

296

297 Minutes later we were headed west on Elyson Road toward a rendezvous with fate in
298 Shelly's wood-paneled station wagon.

299 Turns out fate doesn't care what kind of car you drive. Especially when fate takes the
300 shape of Lionel's brother, Buster.

301 "Shelly, Buster must be the connection. He told Major Tom how to find Lionel, or vice
302 versa. Had to be him," I said.

303 I'd been stumped all day by this unlikely father-son reunion. Lionel had talked about his
304 father, painting Major Tom a booze-sucking, cigar-chomping, wife-beating, soul-stealing,
305 paycheck-squandering excuse for a father. Our wedding came and went with no talk of in-
306 cluding Daddy Dearest, so I thought that I would never meet him.

307 At some point since then, Lionel apparently had changed his mind. If I had to guess, I'd
308 say it happened about six months ago, when he first started acting squirrely.

309 So, last July. Notably around that time we ran into Buster—not once, but twice. Lionel
310 had never mentioned a brother, but then he was standing in front of us in flesh and blood in
311 Wal-Mart. And then Target.

312 Buster had the family's beaky nose but tried to camouflage it with a bushy mustache
313 underneath and a big pair of thick black glasses above. He wound up looking like Groucho
314 Marx, if Groucho wore one of those blue Better Buy golf shirts.

315 "He works at Better Buy, probably the one left on Highland," I said.

316 "Let's hope Buster can keep a job. Otherwise we'll be driving around all day," said
317 Shelly.

318 In the store's major appliance section, I spotted him quickly, snuck up on him from the
319 side without a sound, and tapped his shoulder. Buster jumped a mile and bobbed his clip-
320 board.

321 "Lorna," I said. "Remember me? Your brother and me?" I paused to let him think,
322 though it didn't seem to help. "Now, I know you been talking to Lionel AND your daddy.
323 Spill it."

324 A tall lady inspecting a front-loading washer shot me a funny look. I ignored her.

325 Buster glanced side to side, like he was looking for an emergency exit. "Lorna. Nice to
326 see you." His eyes settled on his shoelaces. "What can I do you for?"

327 "Don't you play stupid with me," I said. "Your brother and your daddy are running
328 around with what belongs to me and Shelly here. You got to know something."

Diamonds Are a Woman's Best Friend

329 Buster went white, then brick red, fingers clenching and unclenching the top of his clip-
330 board. His lips moved. No sound came out.

331 Shelly said, “Son-of-a-gopher. They left you out in the cold, didn’t they?”

332 “You two—come with me,” he said.

333 He shepherded us through a grey door with a push bar marked “EMPLOYEES ONLY.” In
334 the Better Buy stockroom, plastic-wrapped appliances and boxed-up electronics gear
335 formed neat rows. Buster pulled at his mustache and paced back and forth along a line of
336 refrigerators. “Them! Just so *taken* with themselves, aren’t they! Promised me that they
337 would include me in their haul. I thought this was going to be a three-way!”

338 He paused in his pacing and glanced at Shelly and me. “Not like that.” I stifled a hysteri-
339 cal giggle.

340 He started up again. “I thought we were going to pull this deal, all three of us. And now
341 it’s a two-way. But they told me I’d get some!” He flinched. “Sorry. Not like that.”

342 Buster was obviously unaccustomed to an audience.

343 Shelly was digging in her purse again, which brought to mind our ace-in-the-hole.
344 “Buster, Shelly’s got something you want to see.” I motioned to her. “Hold up our new furry
345 friend good and high.” She poked her finger in the wilted hairpiece and twirled it around a
346 few times. “Look familiar, Buster? Why don’t you just try it on, Shelly.” She flipped it on top
347 of her own salt-and-pepper curls and struck a pose, hands on hips.

348 Buster gasped, hand to his lips. “No! Is that—Lionel’s hair?!”

349 “You want to touch it?” asked Shelly. She thrust it at him, and his fingers closed on it,
350 tentatively and then with a death grip.

351 He flung it to the ground and began stomping on the helpless hairpiece, punctuating his
352 assault with outbursts.

353 “That bastard! That lying bastard! You have no idea what I’ve put up with from him. The
354 taunts, the insults.

Diamonds Are a Woman’s Best Friend

355 “Buster, thinning out a little on top, wouldn’t you say?”

356 “Buster, that’s a hot combover.’

357 “Hair Club International leaflets under my pillow. Bro-Gaine coupons on my windshield.

358 I was never safe. And—the whole time?” Spittle bubbled at Buster’s mouth corners. “I prom-

359 ise, he’s going to pay.”

360 I pounced. “You promise? Promise?” I hugged him around the neck. He smelled like

361 Canny Cat meat paté after a couple of days in the sun. “We knew you’d help us.”

362 “Now, let go,” he said, suddenly abashed. “We need to check the time. Major Tom will

363 make Lionel stop to watch Blox News soon. He’s addicted to Nils Cavootoe, kinda like Rain

364 Man and Judge Wapner.”

365 Shelly peered at her watch. “By my calculation, we have 35 minutes. Cavootoe starts at

366 3.”

367 “My car’s just outside,” said Buster.

368

369 Good news: Buster was driving me and Shelly to our Rubber Royal Family jewels. Bad

370 news: stronger cat food smell. Shelly looked green. I rolled down my window and pointed

371 my nose toward fresh air. “Where we headed?”

372 Buster said, “Daddy’s cable got cut last week. They can’t go to his place. I’m betting

373 they’re at The Good Ole Days.”

374 “Good Ole Days? That ’50s place?” said Shelly.

375 “Not ’50s anymore. New owner’s done it up ’80s. Kind of fun—you been?”

376 The ’80s were the good ole days? Unbelievable. I should just join AARP and move into

377 assisted living.

378 “Whatever,” I said.

379 The diner looked like someone had barfed up Rubik's cubes, yellow Pac-Man balls, and
380 *Star Wars* posters. In the background, Journey was singing overwrought lyrics about sepa-
381 rate ways. A waitress with a tight perm and megalithic earrings popped her gum at us.

382 "Like, can I seat you?"

383 We didn't need her help. Lionel and Major Tom were smack in the middle of the dining
384 area, facing the mounted TV screen (distinctly NOT from the '80s) splashed with the Blox
385 News logo. Major Tom was poking around his mouth with a toothpick, and Lionel was
386 cleaning out a bowl of free beer nuts.

387 Shelly nodded their direction. "Look at them. Not a care in the world."

388 "Lionel!" I called. "And Major Tom! Imagine that." We crossed over to their table.

389 I pulled up a chair and sat down right by Lionel. He automatically shifted away, but
390 Shelly was already on the other side. We were the bread for a Lionel sandwich.

391 "I'm giving you one last chance to return Mama's diamonds," I said.

392 Major Tom sniffed. Lionel didn't say a word. They hadn't even noticed Buster yet. Ca-
393 vootoe's head filled the screen as he carried on about the daily signs of the apocalypse. Why
394 were the two so transfixed—the boob tube was on mute, for gosh sakes.

395 "We never got nothing from you," said Lionel. "Maybe made a little mess or rearranged
396 some furniture."

397 A little mess. Sure. I stood up straight, lifted my chin(s), and instructed, "Give me
398 Mama's diamonds." My palm was open and waiting. Father and son weren't even looking at
399 me.

400 I marched over to the waitress. "Give me the remote."

401 She passed it silently, and I punched the power. Before the picture faded completely, I
402 had both men's attention.

403 "Hey! What's going on here? He didn't get to tell us anything about Hillary yet," said Ma-
404 jor Tom.

Diamonds Are a Woman's Best Friend

405 "You mean Robbery Hillham?" said Lionel, guffawing and gesturing for the remote.
406 "Turn it back on."
407 I stood firm and repeated, "The diamonds. Hand them over."
408 "Who's going to make me?" said Lionel.
409 Shelly *a-hemmed* for attention, and when we looked, Buster was wearing Lionel's wig
410 and grinning like a cheshire cat. Shelly did that Vanna White thing with her hands so we
411 could fully appreciate the effect.
412 Lionel abruptly found lint on his pants that needed immediate attention.
413 "It's OK, Lionel," I said. "After all, I got my hormones for these dang hot flashes. And,
414 Lord knows, these bosoms weren't sitting at my navel during high school. I've had 15 more
415 years to get where I am, but I still get it." I paused. "I wonder about your Millenial Floozy."
416 "You wouldn't," Lionel gulped.
417 "She's bound to be a pretty understanding girl. You like her, so she must be."
418 "You couldn't," he said. "You don't even know her name."
419 He was right, but I zipped my lip and returned his furious glare.
420 "Give us back the diamonds and Sugar Britches will never know about your—*a-hem*—
421 dependency."
422 I took out my phone and dialed a fake number, hovering my finger over the "send" but-
423 ton. "Give us back the diamonds."
424 "No matter," said Major Tom. "Don't listen. We're set here, got us enough to last a long
425 time. We don't need Cara. She'll just complicate things between the two of us."
426 No answer.
427 Major Tom tried again. "C'mon, son, ain't no-nothing to it. Lots of men have rugs. Sure
428 they do! Let me think of someone." Long silence. "I bet Nils Cavootoe has one!"
429 At that, Lionel pushed his chair back, hopped up, and said, "You're kidding me, right, old
430 man? Like Cara would go for that."

Diamonds Are a Woman's Best Friend

431 “If I’m choosing between you with diamonds, or Cara with *high-quality, hand-stitched*
432 *hair enhancements* that I *prefer* not to reveal, it’s clear.”

433 He pulled a plastic sandwich baggie with the diamonds from his front pocket, dropped
434 it on the table, and made for the door.

435 Major Tom, no pride at all, grabbed for the bag, but Shelly was too fast for him. She
436 rolled it into a tight ball and jammed it into her purse.

437 “Not yours,” she said. “Now git.”

438 Major Tom made like he was going to try again, but he saw the waitress staring at us
439 and reconsidered.

440 “Lionel and his prick!” he said. And left.

441 “Oh, waitress,” I said. “You have any Corona?”

442 Shelly, Buster, and I sat and savored the limey taste of victory. The Rubber Princesses
443 might not win out over Father Time and age, but they had bested the Dufresne Boys. And
444 diamonds are a *woman’s* best friend.