

A Day In June

Mandy rolled over to look at the time but couldn't seem to open her eyes all the way. Kyle was snoring and Jake was in his crib playing with his stuffed animals and singing softly to himself. The room was dark because of the black out curtains and she guessed it might be around 6am. She had the ghost of a headache but felt way too heavy and apathetic to deal with it. She let herself be pulled back into sleep and tried to return to a place where all the problems and worries didn't work their way up through the murky depths to consciousness. Sometimes holding on to the relaxation was unmanageable, but last night's drinks and the shadow memories of things she wanted to keep at bay lulled her back down. She slept again.

Later the sun slanted in through the small opening where the curtains met. She became aware of Kyle's hand on her thigh. He was absentmindedly stroking her.

"Shit, what time is it?" She looked at the clock, it was 10:17. Then she heard the drone of the tv from the living room and figured Jake was watching cartoons and eating Fruit Loops or Lucky Charms out of the box. She closed her eyes again and let herself be lulled into another state. The lazy sex and a left over joint they passed back and forth relaxed her. They had slept for at least nine hours after partying the afternoon and evening away. She had loved spending time with Kyle's sister and her new boyfriend, Ralph. He had brought pot and take out tacos to the house so Mandy had smoked weed along with her many margaritas. Ralph was a big flirt and Mandy had to balance her responses to him and keep Katie's feelings in mind at the same time. She felt justified with all the drinking and partying because Jake was with Brennan, her ex, and wouldn't be brought back until at least midnight.

Mandy tried to reconstruct different segments from the night but found it difficult to put all of the pieces where they belonged. Kyle now, was haltingly caressing her and reaching for what was left of a beer on his nightstand. He offered some to her and she shook her head groggily. *Yeah, that was all she needed, more booze. What an idiot,* she thought. She drew her body away from him and lay looking up at the ceiling. She noticed for the hundredth time the cobweb that stretched from the light fixture to the space directly above her side of the waterbed. She said to herself that she would clean it off today, after breakfast. Kyle turned over and seemed to forget about the sex. She continued to go over moments from the party. Now flashes of conversation surfaced from the night before. They bubbled up and added new, garishly colored scenes to the "Amanda Reality Show" that played continuously in her head. She had a hazy vision of sitting on Ralph's lap while Katie argued with Kyle over something that was too boring for her to concentrate on. Even with that contention it had felt great to spend time without Jake and his incessant talking.

"Mommy why are those boys kissing? Mommy, I want to go to Silverwood. Mommy, I need more Legos. Mommy, I want you to read to me." The kid never stopped.

Spending time with adults was such a luxury these days. Work didn't count because the people she worked with seemed at least as immature as Kyle and then there were the old people that always managed to throw her into a depressed funk. It kind of scared her how much she had enjoyed the attention of Ralph. He was ten years older than the rest of them and knew a lot of interesting facts about finance, politics, and traveling. He had been to Europe and

even had a friend who lived in Austria, or was it Australia? She wondered if this relationship with Kyle was starting to sour. She didn't have those butterflies any more when coming back home to him. He was a good worker when he was working but there often seemed to be reasons why he couldn't contribute his share to the household. Maybe his problems were more serious than she wanted to accept. She suspected that he spent a fair amount of money on weed, beer, and sometimes, coke. He wouldn't talk about it and always changed the subject to fixate on one of her shortcomings, so she usually ended up resigning to the status quo. Well, whatever it was she couldn't really think about it now. She would have to get ready for work in a few hours and didn't know if she had a clean uniform. Her shift at the nursing home was 3:30 to midnight. Feelings of dread started to overwhelm her and she knew that her headache would grow worse if she didn't drink some water. She risked irritating Kyle with her request

"Hey, can you get me some water, I'm one parched woman here?"

"Sure babe." Kyle at times was extremely agreeable, almost as if his personality was drained thin. This wishy-washy quality along with his severe lack of ambition irritated her daily. He ambled into the bathroom and came back with water in Jake's Spiderman cup.

"Shit Kyle, there's toothpaste all over this stupid thing."

"Too fuckin' bad babe, that's what you get. I'm going back to sleep, it ain't even 11 yet. And don't wake me neither, I don't have a shift 'till tomorrow." Mandy drank the water and lay back to rest.

At 12:10 she bolted upright in the bed. Her head was throbbing now.

"Oh Jesus, I have to be at work in a couple hours and I need to fix Jake something to eat. Damn it, I feel like shit." She nudged Kyle as she was speaking but he groaned and batted her hand away and as usual left her to deal with everything. Mandy pulled herself out of the bed and went to the bathroom. When she came out she walked into the single wide's living room. There were toys scattered from one side of the room to the other and the tv was on an infomercial station. A woman with fake red hair and overdone makeup was selling stretch polyester pants in ungodly colors that even Mandy's mother wouldn't wear. She found the remote behind a pillow and turned it off. Fruit Loops and a bag of marshmallows lay open on the coffee table along with dirty glasses and plates from the night before. The ashtrays were full of Katie's lipsticked smeared cigarettes and the room smelled rank. Suddenly she had a searing memory of Ralph's mouth on her neck. She pushed the image down and focused instead on where she was standing. She looked around the room and thought about how damned depressing it was. It occurred to her that she hadn't been aware of their dogs being let out or in all morning. They had two, a lab and pit bull mix named Rosco and a chihuahua that Jake had named Tanny. Surely she would have heard the slamming of the screen door but that hadn't registered at all this morning. *Where was everybody?* Jake and the dogs were obviously not in the house. *They must be outside playing in the yard or the sandbox.*

Mandy felt a buzzing creeping up her face and into her ears where it became a roaring rasp. With adrenaline pumping now she ran to the door stepping on legos and action figures that were strewn all over the floor. Her body propelled her down the three front steps and into the yard which she frantically scanned. Several vehicles and pieces of equipment were visible in their

usual places. The petunias looked extra scruffy in the bright afternoon light and the temperature already had to be creeping past 90. *No one is here*, she thought, *where in the fuck are the dogs, where is Jake? Could Brennan have come back and picked them all up? Maybe he was pissed at me for sleeping through the morning and took them to his mom's place? That's all I need, Valerie already hates me. Jesus, where are they?*

Mandy stopped for a second and ran around a tree to the sandbox. Then she ran past the old farm equipment, the detached snow plow and Kyle's red pickup. There was no sign of any of them. As she rounded the east front of the house something caught her attention. Her eye was drawn to her old powder blue Subaru, parked about 10 feet from the raspberry bushes - Jake's blond head!

Oh God, Jake is in the car playing around! She ran to the car, ready to scream at the boy for leaving the house. She opened the door. Her life changed.