

TELL ME ABOUT HER

Fiction by Ronald Kaiser

*Another slice-of-life short story from promising
Granite State author, Ronald Kaiser[1]*

"Tell me about her," she says, lying in bed one night. He knows who she's talking about right away.

"Let's not do this now. I'll tell you some other time," he comes back.

"Oh, come on baby, please?"

"Well I'm not exactly proud of it. Can you blame me for not wanting to talk about it?"

"Well, it still kind of bothers me. The whole thing is just so out of character. And then I start to think, well, maybe he's not the way I think he is..."

He sits up. "See?! See?! This is what I'm afraid of. This is why I don't want to even talk about it."

"But talking might help."

"Help? Help what? Help me feel like shit all over again?"

"No, calm down, honey. I'm sorry. But try to think of where I'm coming from. I mean if I'd ever done anything like that, you'd..."

"Ok, honey, ok. First of all, I didn't get your goddamned case history when we got together. We got together after college, for Christ sake, so I just kind of assumed... god, I can't believe we're even talking about this, but I just kind of assumed you'd been with a few guys before me. Well, more than a few."

"What? What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Karen sits up, cheeks looking like she's overapplied rouge sporadically up and down her cheeks.

"Now don't get feisty on me," Steve reaches for her.

She shoves his hands away, crosses her arms. "I can't believe you'd even say that!"

"What?" says Steve, sliding up so he is sitting. "You can drag up shit about my past, but the second I ask about something seedy in yours, you get all..."

"Seedy? Seedy? It wasn't fucking seedy, ok? It was college, and I was single! I never fucking cheated!"

"Neither did I," says Steve. "She was the one who was married. I was broken-hearted, remember? You were the one who stopped calling me."

"Oh, so the whole thing was my fault, is that it?"

"No, it was not your fault. It was her fault."

She belts Steve a good one with a pillow. "I can't believe you! It takes two to tango. Of course you'd just blame it all on her."

"Karen! You have no idea what the fuck you're talking about! You don't even know what happened, and you're making judgments!"

"Oh, I know what happened, alright."

"Yeah, okay, you know the fucking basics. You know, the one thing. But that wasn't all of it, and besides it wasn't even important."

She folds her arms. "Oh, that's real nice. Just screw them and leave them on the roadside, is that it?"

"No, that is not it. Look, why are you even asking about this? It's morbid."

"I'm asking because it's almost worse not knowing, you know? The way it is now, I think about her sometimes, and my imagination gets the best of me."

"Your imagination is a landfill, and I'm a sorry bastard living at the bottom, trying to claw my way out."

"Cut it out! I'm being serious! I promise, just get it all out, you know? Even if you don't feel better afterward, I will, and I promise I'll never bring it up again."

"Look. Why is this so important?"

"Honey, it would make me feel better."

"You know we were standing ten feet away from her last week."

"What! What? Last week?!"

"Honey, relax. See, this is why I think this is a bad idea."

"Well, what the fuck? Where did you see her last week?"

"We, honey. I said we. At the supermarket. She was in the next aisle over."

"And you didn't even tell me?"

"Well honey, obviously I don't want to talk about it, so why would I? She doesn't mean anything to me, so it wasn't even significant in my mind."

"Oh, it wasn't even significant," she says. "I'll bet it was pretty goddamned significant to her husband and kids."

"I didn't mean that."

"Oh? What did you mean then?"

"Look, would you stop? You're making me nervous, for Christ sake. I don't need to feel like I'm on the goddamned witness stand when I'm in my own bed, in my own house. Here you are sitting and judging me about something you don't have any goddamned idea about."

"Then just tell me about it!"

"...if I do, you have to promise to never bring it up again."

"I can't do that honey! I mean, what if I still have questions?"

"Then you better get them all out right now, because I am not going to answer them after tonight. It's too much torture. For me, for, for us, okay?"

"Well wait a minute, why is it so much torture? I'll tell you what's really haunted me, if you want to know. What I want to know is this. You're a guy with morals, a loving guy, raised by a loving family, and I'll admit it, I've never so much as seen you check out another girl. So what was it about this girl? I mean, there must have been something there, something pretty special about her for you to sleep with her, multiple times, knowing she was married with kids."

"Oh god, Karen. You're turning this woman into fucking Cleopatra or something. It wasn't like that. Trust me, she was no Cleopatra."

"Well I mean, why even be with her then?"

"I'm not saying she was bad looking. Jesus I hate talking about this. But I'm just saying, your imagination has imbued this, well, skanky woman with all this mystery, like she's some goddamn enigma. She's not. Trust me, she's pretty easy to figure out. She was after one thing only."

"Oh, and I suppose you think most women are like that, is that it?" Her color begins to rise.

"Would you stop? You know I really feel like you're trying to bait me here or something. I get the vague suspicion you're trying to pick a fight."

"I'm asking because it's almost worse not knowing, you know? The way it is now, I think about her sometimes, and my imagination gets the best of me."

"Your imagination is a landfill, and I'm a sorry bastard living at the bottom, trying to claw my way out."

"Now why would I do that? I just want to know everything about you, you know? Don't you want to know everything about me?"

"No. In fact, as far as I'm concerned, the less we talk about, well, certain periods of your life, the better."

"Well I guess I'm just different."

"You're different alright."

She punches his arm. "Stop it. So you were gonna say what it was about this woman that attracted you to her."

"No, no, I was definitely not about to talk about that. This is like a car accident scene for you, isn't it? One of your CSI shows."

"Well, in a way, I guess."

"Well just remember that I was the one driving this fucking car, ok? Or in the very least I was in the passenger seat."

"Ok. I'll be good. Just tell me about her."

"And you'll stop bringing her up afterward."

"Promise." She slides up next to him under the covers and crosses her bare leg over his.

"Well, I come out of Bertolio's after my shift and there's a pair of underwear on my windshield."

"Underwear? What kind?"

"Jesus Christ, I don't know. It was a thong, red, I think, and all satiny."

"Did you like them? I mean, do you like underwear like that?"

"...yes."

"Ok, go on." She clutches Steve's arm tighter.

"So it was February, and I happened to be giving Rob, the fry cook, a ride home. He looks at the underwear and says, 'Whoo boy, you lucky son of a bitch. Tell you what, those little things wouldn't come close to fitting any woman I ever been with.' Now that was probably true, because Rob, well, he had no teeth, and he'd sort of let himself go. Not that he was fat. He wasn't; he was skinny as a worm, but he just always ended up with big women. He thought it was because of his teeth. I think he was right.

"So, anyway, I had no idea what was up with the undies. I thought maybe it was a joke. I didn't think anything of it. Then I work a shift the following night, and Jennie walks up to me. Now I've known Jennie a year, and I swear I never flirted with her or nothing. I was with you. You know this when we were taking time off together, you and me."

"Jennie," she says, and nods solemnly.

"So she holds her hand out like she's gonna give me something, and I put my hand out and she presses something into it, and closes it over the object. Looks right at me and says, 'Put this in your pocket and keep it warm for Friday night.' When I open my hand it's a bottle of massage oil."

"I'm asking because it's almost worse not knowing, you know? The way it is now, I think about her sometimes, and my imagination gets the best of me."

"Your imagination is a landfill, and I'm a sorry bastard living at the bottom, trying to claw my way out."

"Massage oil?"

I nod. "That Friday just so happened to be Valentine's Day."

Karen says nothing.

"So I should tell you about Alissa, too. Alissa was Jennie's friend, and she was about as horrible an influence as a friend could possibly be. She herself was in the middle of a divorce from a hell of a nice guy, a cop. You know what cops' hours are like, and she took advantage of that fact. She just didn't consider that he was also a detective. She wasn't all that bright. But anyway, she was always over there whispering to Jennie, and both of them would sort of leer at me, the same way I'd spent my life leering at just about every woman I'd been attracted to. Before you, that is. You know I only have eyes for you now." He's starting to sweat.

"Go on," Karen urges.

"So, anyway, Alissa was like Lady Macbeth up there, filling Jennie's ears with God knows what. The next thing I know Alissa's coming down the ramp, and she's smiling at me and she gets real close like she wants to whisper, so I let her, and she says, 'Just to let you know, Jennie and I have a room all reserved at the Day's Inn for Friday night.'"

"Valentine's Day?" I ask.

"Alissa nodded, with this big, lip-biting smile. She leaned in again. 'And it'll be, um, just the three of us.' She darted back up the aisle afterward, toward Jennie who was down by the other end of the restaurant. Even from far-off I could see she was blushing crimson, with a pursed up look on her face that reminded me of when a kid asks another kid to ask someone out for him, then rushes off, afraid to see the exchange.

Karen extracts herself from Steve and sits up, her back straight against the headboard. "Two women?" She looks cross.

"Would you just let me finish?" says Steve. "You wanted to hear this, and I'm goin' to tell it to you. So Friday comes around. Now on Friday nights everyone from Bertoli's goes across the street to the Rendevous Pub. That's what it was called. And after that, you know, Jennie and Alissa had that room at the Day's Inn, which was right across the street."

Karen asks, "Was Alissa married, too?"

"She was getting divorced."

"But she wasn't divorced yet?"

"I don't think so."

"She have children, too?"

"Yes."

"..."

She slides over a foot away from Steve and cradles her shoulders: "I'm not too sure I want to hear this anymore."

"So Friday night I got off my shift at five. And I went to Walmart and bought an Xbox and four or five games, and played those all night."

Karen says with hope, "So you didn't go through with it?"

"Not right then, no."

"Not then?"

"Not with Alissa. Alissa was a redhead, like you. But any similarity stops right there. There are two kinds of redheads out there. Now Karen, you're gorgeous. She was the other kind of redhead. I wanted nothing to do with Alissa."

"So if she was hot you would have done it?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Then why is it important what she looked like?"

"I don't know, Karen, I'm just telling you the story. And, no, I never had the threesome."

"Why?"

"Well, and remember, Karen, you'd left me at this point, and I was pretty low. But anyway, I did not have the threesome because I just could not bear it, not with two married women. One married woman is bad enough. But two? A threesome with two married women is like a one-way ticket straight to Hell. Tell you what, I did masturbate about fifteen times that night."

"Oh, thanks for the visual," she says.

"Hey, you wanted to know all this. So anyway, I see Jennie at work that Monday, and she starts in with all this business about how her husband doesn't love her, and how they weren't in love at all anymore, anyway."

"And you fell for it?"

"Well yeah, I fucking fell for it, ok? What the hell was I supposed to do? I didn't think you were coming back, and I was drinking a lot and, yeah, I was lonely. So there."

"So when did it happen?"

"That Tuesday night. And then again a couple times the next week, and then I broke it off."

"And she's living in the next town over?"

"God, yes. I don't like seeing her, so don't get any funny ideas."

"Did she see us? At the supermarket?"

"Yes. In fact she came up to me when I went back to grab milk, 'cause we'd forgot it."

She sits up. "Really? You talked to her?"

"She talked to me."

"What did she say?"

"She said she thinks you're really pretty, and not to fuck it up."

"She said that?"

"Yes."

"She doesn't sound so bad, after all."

"Sure," says Steve.

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[1] If you have a fictional piece and you would like to post on the Coffee Coaster, please send via email to Brian Wright. Mainly, I'm looking for short stories 1000-4000 words—with authenticity and feeling, humor, about them... and, if political, at least an implied peace-and-liberty edge. If your piece is posted, I will contact you for approval first; at this stage in the CC world, there is no remuneration but your work will receive a full professional copyedit.

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