

Where were you last night?

By Neil Bakshi

Jessica woke up around noon. She tossed her head lazily to look around her, squinted away from the light coming through the Venetian blinds. She sat up and rubbed her forehead, a beer can sliding off of her sleeping bag.

She stood up, taking the sleeping bag with her, holding the edge up above her breasts. Cans rattled under her feet as she moved to the kitchen table and sat down. The TV was still on, an old black-and-white movie murmuring in its box. The entire apartment reeked of alcohol and sweat.

Felix, the cat, jumped onto the table from the windowsill and slunk his way over to her face, rubbing against it. "Hi, honey," she purred back. "I suppose you're hungry." She stroked his whole body, ears to tail, in one long, slow swipe that she used on both cats and men. Felix sat down, Sphinx-style, and yawned. Jessica yawned, too. "Stop it," she said playfully. "That wasn't fair." Felix didn't seem to care; he turned and bathed his tail.

I flipped the eggs in the pan with a greasy smack that made both Jessica and Felix turn. Lowering the heat, I looked over my shoulder at Jessica and asked, "I suppose you slept well?"

Jessica stroked the cat again. "Oh, yes." A little smile curled, barely visible. "Very well." She looked back into the living room. "Am I the last one up?"

"I think Mike's still asleep." I opened the cabinet and took down a plate.

"Oh. Yeah, I guess he would be." She tried to see around me into the pan. "How many eggs did you make?"

"Just two. Why?"

"Could you make me one?" She rearranged the sleeping bag around her breasts. "Please?"

I sighed. "Tell you what. You can have one of these, because I'm not going to make another." I got another plate down from the cabinet.

"Thanks, Andy. You're beautiful, you know that?"

I concentrated very hard on transferring the eggs to the plates and bringing them over to the table. Before he could make his move, I unceremoniously snatched up Felix and put him back on the counter, then got out two forks from the drawer.

For the next few minutes, there was nothing except the clacking of forks against plates and Felix's pacing on the counter. A lock of Jessica's golden hair fell into her egg, and she flipped it back without interest, releasing the edge of her sleeping bag.

The harsh sound of the shower came from down the hall. Mike must have gotten his ass up, finally. "Is that Mike?" Jessica asked between mouthfuls.

"Yeah," I replied. "Everyone else is out getting coffee, because my maker is broken."

We finished at about the same time, and I took her fork and her plate. Two pairs of catlike eyes followed me as I opened the dishwasher and dropped the plates and forks in, then slammed it closed and leaned against it. The white noise from the shower made it hard to think. That, and Jack Daniels. I wondered how long Mike was going to take. I felt like shit.

Jessica stood up from the table, gathering her sleeping bag once more. "I'm going to take the next shower, okay?"

"Sure," I mumbled, waving her off. "Go ahead." I rubbed my temples.

She came over to me and touched my cheek. "You feeling all right, Andy?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." My spine tingled at her touch.

"Okay. Just making sure." She stole a look down the hallway and then, grinning, kissed me on the lips and shuffled out of the kitchen.

Felix meowed irritably. "What the fuck are you looking at?" I demanded. He arched his back at me and jumped down to the floor, slinking after Jessica's sexy body.

John and I decided to get some cigarettes before we left for the concert. I slipped one arm through my jacket and opened the front door, keeping Felix in with my foot, then closed it and pushed the other arm through.

"So, how's life, Andy?" John asked as we walked down the steps.

"I don't know. Bored." I got out my Zippo and my last cigarette. "Life and I are not really on speaking terms right now." I lit the cigarette and exhaled against the wind.

"Looks like it's gonna rain."

"Wow, look at that sunset." I've always loved color clashes, and the pink of the sky worked well against the green treetops. Colors used to be important to me once, back when I was an art major.

John grunted. We walked on in silence for a bit.

"So, I've got to say that I'm really enjoying this weekend," John said, trying to get the conversation started again. "It's good to see you guys. I haven't been back here since I graduated."

"At least you graduated. Hell, I might as well have stayed in New York City."

"Yeah, but you flunked out on purpose."

"I still flunked out." I scuffed my boot against the sidewalk. It's a nervous habit I picked up in fifth grade, because my best friend at the time did it and I wanted to be just like her. Story of my entire life.

John stuffed his hands in his pockets and said, "So, if I don't go to the concert with you guys, when are you going to get back?"

"You're not coming? John, you loser."

"Well, I was thinking I'd get the place ready for the party. You know, kick the beer cans out of the way. There's going to be a lot of people coming, in case you didn't know. You can't just come home and host a party like it's nothing."

I had no idea what the real reason was, but it was still a nice try. "That's actually a good idea, John. You're the only considerate person in this entire town." I looked at the end of my cigarette, at the contrast between the ashes and the burning tobacco underneath. I've always liked that clash, too. I wondered if the tobacco was real or if it was some sort of substitute, like cheese food.

"You know what, Andy?" John said suddenly. I kind of wished he would shut up, I was enjoying my thoughts, but he'd decided this conversation had to go on.

"What's that, John?"