

This story contains mature themes and situations. I guess this is where I say no one under 18 admitted without parent or guardian.

The Worst Xian: Installment X

The Post War Years

Morning broke as late afternoon Wednesday.

My head felt like a hard boiled egg, the shell of which had been cracked with the back of a spoon; spider web rings of semi-concentric circles spreading out from the point of impact.

"Who's the girl, Shade?"

A familiar voice, out of the complete darkness. There seemed no logic to it. A warm strong mans voice coming from out of the black in the middle of the night. It had been weeks since I had a boy over, and none of them had stayed past 2 anno.

Sometimes I worried about the pain and alone that always seem to be with me, it makes my head spin and my eyes cry. Love a girl. Hate a girl. Hate yourself even more.

"Karen?" I responded back blindly.

"No, Zoe."

I opened my eyes to find Dan sitting at my desk, his deck cradled in his lap, a cup of coffee in his hand.

"You know, the hottee with the septum ring."

It took too much of my strength to pull myself upright on bed. Blinking, I realized that it was not dark in the apartment, but quite light, much of it coming from the window.

"What day is it?"

"Wednesday, sleepin' beauty." Dan sipped coffee and checked his pad. "I refilled the maker so, if you get up, there should be plenty of coffee." Dan then looked at me, he was perhaps the least judgmental man I have ever met. It happens when you're like him. You consider yourself a fuck-up, even pride yourself on it, sit leaves little room to judge other people. However there was an uncharacteristic downward turn to the corners of his eyes when he smiled. Letting your home life and social drug abuse interfere with your job, not mine, was his department, not mine. I had spent 2 full days in bed hadn't I?

"Zoe called?" I croaked out, trying to shift the topic as I wrapped my top sheet around me.

Dan burst out in near riotous laughter, almost spilling his coffee onto the floor. Surprised I nearly lost my grip on my sheets.

"What's so funny?"

"Yeah, she called." He broke into a chuckle before continuing. "She called to say that she got a gig and would be here," he pointed at the floor of the apartment, "Friday with her fish." Dan began laughing again, I could only assume in reaction to the look on my face. "She seemed very excited about the fact you had asked her to come up."

"Shit."

I tied the sheet into a makeshift skirt and I made my way into the kitchen. Pressing the button on the maker I listened to the whine of the blades, a sound unpleasantly similar to a Vulcan, a moment later my mug was filled to the brim with hot coffee.

"BTW, your machine makes a vicious cuppa. Took half a pound of sugar just to make mine safe."

"Really I drink mine black," I said, settling into my favorite chair. A garage sale monstrosity of blue vinyl and chrome tubing.

"I guess that means your stomach hates you as much as your liver."

Dan chuckled aloud at his own joke, then looked to his pad. "By the way, Marge gave you the week off, she said she would need the time to edit your story into something printable"

The story...

"Have you read it?" I asked, tracing a circle around the rim of my mug.

"No she wouldn't let me near it." Dan sipped his coffee and set aside his pad, still lit, onto the desk. "She said your language was a little too strong for my virgin ears."

We both laughed.

"So who's this Zoe."

I pulled the comforter, from the bed onto myself, and began taking regular deep sips of coffee.

"She's this girl I know from back home. It's great" I announced. "We're a pretty mutually destructive couple, me with my liquor, and her with her junk."

I let the comment sit in the air for a while.

"We met one day at my dad's hospital. She introduced herself, we went back to her place. I ended up most nights until I moved here."

Dan whistled. "So you've invited a junkie nurse to come live with you? Impressive my friend."

I asked Dan to hand me my pad.

"Junkie stripper; actually. She just happened to be in the hospital one morning with a friend who's appendix had burst, on-stage."

Dan just shook his head. I thumbed my screen, and waited for it to recognize my print. My messages, mostly junk from lists, came up on the desktop. A few solicitations, my mother telling me to not miss my nephews birthday, which I had. I checked my sent folder and found several drafts of appalling, drunken, "love" letters to Karen. In various manners I had tried to explain what had happened with me, with the war. I even mentioned how I prayed daily that she would break up with her boyfriend. Fortunately none of them had been sent.

But a different one had been.

ZOE,

GLAD YOU'RE COMING TO THE AREA. GO AHEAD AND TELL JANA THAT YOU'LL BE STAYING WITH ME. I'LL PULL UP SOME EPISODES OF THE REAL ADVENTURES OF JOHNNY QUEST, ICE SOME SAPPHIRE AND BLACK LABEL, AND WE'LL TALK ABOUT OLD TIMES.

ARE YOU BRINING ELVIS?

I immediately went back to view her last message.

*Thank you God. Thank you."*

"Well it's not as bad as I had anticipated," Dan looked at me, giggling.

He had been writing, something into his deck, while I had been combing my message archives.

I read the message aloud.

"Johnny Quest and Elvis?" He jotted something on his pad.

"Yeah," I remarked standing up, moving slowly towards him, trying to get a look at what he was writing. "The last time I saw her we were both liquored upon Sapphire and Johnny Walker watching old epi's of **Johnny Quest**. We got pretty hammered and had..." I thought of the most polite way to phrase it. In mind I could still remember her standing bent over the couch in the her living room. Her skin so soft, her legs so long, her body so lithe. I imagined the taste of the sweat on the back of her neck, the smell of her hair. Of there was also the feel of her. "Let's just say we had *exotic* sex."

"I see..." Dan was again writing. This time tilting it so I couldn't see what it was he was writing. "And Elvis?"

I explained Elvis. The little wiry haired black pup that she had gotten last Christmas from her mum. Very friendly, but had an unhealthy habit of trying to get some of what ever substances were being abused that night. Only animal I ever met that liked gin. Dan just kept writing away.

"What the hell are you writing about?" I burst.

"I'm writing about you." He finished his cup of coffee and went to get another one. "You see," he shouted from the kitchen. "I recently decided that you're life was much too entertaining to go unrecorded. So I have taken to writing down all the funny things that happen to you." He seated himself in the blue chair, as I had taken up my desk chair. "So if you'll just give me a more vulgar definition for *exotic* sex I'll try and close out this chapter."

"Always the reporter," I spit at him.

"Don't call me a fucking reporter. I'm a journalist." Dan scrawled something violently onto his pad.

"Sorry." I pulled a pair of speed pants on underneath my bed sheet toga. Dan looked pissed, which was odd. "I mean it, I'm sorry. Let me make it up to you."

Dan's brow was furrowed, he looked at his pad then at me, whatever I had said had struck some nerve. He stared at me from underneath his brows. The room was still has he looked at me. None of my robots moved, for one rare moment there wasn't audio streaming, the main flat was blank. I suddenly realized how long I had been out of it. All of the day to day chores and preoccupations had been ignored leaving my apartment like the flat of a dead septuagenarian. The kind of neglect that occurs in an apartment when no one knows you have died until the smell of a dead senior citizen creeps into their little world.

"How are you going to make it up to me?"

I let that wry smirk, that I had practiced all through out high school, cross my lips. It was the mirror reverse of my mother's father. Not the result of genetics, like my ability to curl my tongue. Instead the result of hours and days spent looking at the portrait photograph of him, that sat on top of my dresser as a child.

To look at the photograph was to see the personification of confidence. "Pappy" Shade. Young, smart looking, and dressed to kill. I always wanted that self assurance. To posses that smirk that let everyone know, without word, without action, that you are in charge. In charge of yourself, your situation, and quite possibly of everyone in the room.

"Let's say we grab the 'Lev to Baltimore and I get us both hammered?"

Dan's jaw dropped.

"You just came out of a three day binge induced coma and now you want to go get loaded again?" He shook his head.

I grabbed my favorite Techen Shirt out of my drawer, and headed towards the bathroom.

"Listen," I shouted starting the water. "I have two days 'till Zoe gets here and my life gets truly weird. I am not about to waste it *recovering* from anything. And if you *really* want to document my life in that little pad of yours, you'll be ready to go by the time I get out of the shower."

The water steamed. It felt heavenly against my bare skin, it cleared the sleep from my head. I lingered in the shower longer than usual. The water, baptismal, pushed the sleep and stupor from my head. I tried to recall sending the mail to Zoe. Nothing but a blank. What the **fuck** could I have been thinking?

*Oh, Lord. What have I done? I must be insane.*

*Don't get me wrong Zoe is a wonderful girl, just not the answer to my problems. I don't want to hurt her. Fuck, all I do is hurt her.*

*Fuck, fuck, fuck. Sorry.*

*Lord, please give me the strength and the wisdom to deal with this. To do the right thing, to find the right answers. Fuck. Zoe's a wonderful girl. In another life I'd' marry her. Lord we both know she deserves better than some idiot who's in love with a girl who doesn't loves him.*

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

*Sorry.*

I came out of the bathroom locking the collar of the shirt. It sucked itself close to my body, an oily black and red patterned second skin. Dan still sat in the chair.

"So?"

"So... We just need to stop at my place to change."