

DISTRACTIONS

The Writer's Wife by William Lenco

It hardly made any difference whether she set the alarm or not. She was always the one who was up first. He just couldn't seem to do it. Couldn't keep up. He was getting old, he said. He was getting tired, he complained. She was just too active, he almost whined. She hated it when he whined.

He had said this to her one day - and she swore on the Good Book it was true when she saw her friends at the hairdressers that Wednesday - He said, "Bev, I'm a smoker. I drink too much. I think too much. I lie awake at night too much. I just can't always have the energy that you want me to have - I'm sorry". Can you just believe that? Her friends could. They knew him. They shook their heads and made tsk-tsk sounds with their tongues. How did she cope? Why didn't she leave?

What was keeping her? She had a job. A good job. A job she had worked hard to get and harder to keep. A job where she was important. Where she worked long hours to bring home food so that he could eat.

What did he do? Nothing. Well almost nothing. Sure - He was a writer. But what had he published? One book. That was three years ago. "Yes but I'm working on another you don't understand..."

That was it. That, "You don't understand", that all men seemed to have when they were feeling particularly superior. What didn't she understand?

She understood that he couldn't afford to sleep in till noon and then sit at a typewriter till three am with a quart of rye and a pack of smokes. He couldn't afford it if she wasn't putting food on the table. That was for sure. You could take that to the bank and travel on the interest. His little, meagre "grant money" that the government, through some clerical error on their part no doubt, had been kind enough to give him, would not have kept him in paper, let alone kept up with his vices.

She didn't know why he qualified for the grant money anyway. He didn't deserve it. He wrote one book! Three years ago! Except for a couple of short stories that he wrote the year before that, he had done nothing. And he had gotten ripped off for those! Paid a measly sixty dollars each! For two stories that took him months to write? Who could live on thirty bucks a month? No one, that's who. He certainly couldn't.

That was most of the problem though. He was bad with money. It was bad enough when he threw his own money away on crap like smokes and booze but this was her money, buster, and he'd better remember that if he knew what was best for him. Even the grant money was hers. In a way. It really was. She paid taxes. He didn't. She wouldn't be surprised if her tax dollars went to finance every lame, out of money, qualify for grant money author in the whole damn country. That's what the government did. They decided that all of her hard earned money, that they practically stole each month from her paycheck, went into a pool so that authors could sit around and write crap, drink and smoke - and get paid to do it. She'd bet that if she marked a bill she was paying her taxes with she would see it in his hand within a month. Then it would be gone within an hour. And he'd be smoking away. Pre-

tentious as ever.

He was just plain irresponsible. She wasn't. No sir-ee-bob. She was the most responsible person in the whole god damned country. All she wanted was a small place to call her own so that she could raise a family. Then when the kids were at school she would do the housework quickly so that she could spend some time doing her own thing before she went off to work in the afternoon. All she wanted was someone to take care of her. Someone to make sure she had what she needed and could get at least some of what she wanted. All she wanted. All she wanted. All she wanted was what he had.

She looked in on him. He was sitting. As he was most days. Shifting between being hunched over the typewriter and being stretched out to reread what he had written. There was a big ashtray just full of butts beside him and a lit one was sitting just on the corner of his lip. It was hanging down in a casual way and his left eye was closed to keep the smoke out. There was a half glass of rye on the table beside a sheaf of papers, and a half full bottle beside that which he'd had for almost a week.

He swivelled suddenly in his chair, pulled the cigarette out of his moth and winked at her in a cheerful way. There was a little taste of "Get away, I'm writing" in his eyes but there was a lot of "Hi honey, I love you" and she could see the next novel sitting there underneath it all. The great American novel. The one everyone always spoke about but so few could write. It was there. Behind his eyes. All he had to do was grab it from back there, throw it down on paper and they would finally have everything they wanted. Everything they both wanted.

That's why she had married him, she had told the girls at the hairdressers. She knew. She could see what so few women ever would let themselves see. She would see it in his eyes. She could see it in the way he made her feel. She could see that everything was going to be alright.

The Ring and The Rang by J. Savoie

Hank sat quietly in the safety of his living room stretched out over an easy chair. He lived in a small trailer on the edge of the city. It was almost supper time yet Hank wasn't thinking about supper. He was focusing on the fight that would erupt when his wife came home. Every night they would compete to see who could scream the loudest. She always won. She was always on his back telling him to get a job. He read the classifieds daily, what more could he do? Hank was a small part of a large group who were very unlucky. He just couldn't keep a job for more than a month. In the past twelve months he had been a landscaper, a meat packer, a janitor and various other positions. Hank was a carpenter by trade: unfortunately not a very good one. None of this mattered now for soon his wife would walk through the door disrupting his peace of mind. He recalled a book he once read, Dr. Faustus and imagined himself selling his soul for unimaginable

wealth. These days it seemed even the devil took the poor for granted. He began to watch television when the daily lotto numbers came up. The thought of winning all that money made Hank dream and drool. He always dreamt of winning all that money but he never bought tickets. The phone rang, knocking him out of his daze.

On the fifth ring he picked up the receiver.

"yeah"

"Is Mr. Pruett there please?" The young voice asked.

"speakin'" he replied.

"I can see you Mr. Purrett." The voice said. "I'm watching you through the window."

"Who the hell is this?" Hank demanded.

He was beginning to feel a little uneasy. Paranoia set in and pictures of old enemies flashed in his mind. He didn't think he had any.

"Mr. Pruett I've got something to tell ya, listen real carefully."

"I HAVE A GUN AIMED AT YOUR FOREHEAD YOU BASTARD."

The voice screamed, shrieked and seemed to bleed the words through the receiver.

"What the fuck is this all about?" He cried.

When his breathing had gone back to normal he noticed the phone had already gone dead. He looked out the window to see if anyone was there. He began to realize that no one could have been there. The only thing across the street was an empty green field. He sat down again feeling emotionally drained. He picked up his warm beer from the table in front of him and downed it. He wondered how these things happened to him. One question always leads to another and thinking now was just too much of a strain. He was almost asleep when the front door opened. As his wife walked towards him he heard the ring that signalled the bout to begin.

