

Hubba Hubba

I like to call Dom my Hemingway friend. He's that strong and confident type who would fight a bull or row in to the sea to battle a fish. He's a man's man in an obvious way, struggling and being a hero. The ladies evidently appreciate men like that. He smiles when he throws a wolf whistle out the window and they smile back. Hemingway friends think of the best things to do; they make you feel special.

We're garbage men. When I started in May, hired on as summer help, I was Dom's rookie on the rural route. Now I'm full time. We're partners and buddies. Dom and Billy.

The pay is good. We rake in the tips, from folks like the widow woman for taking her black-and-white TV, and from Mr. Petrie for hauling away his ripped Barcolounger. ("The missus got me a new one.") From Constance, who had to clean out her father's garage. Alzheimer's got him.

Dom drives the truck, being senior and all. He's always got the window rolled down, letting the chicks see his big and tight arms. Dom calls them his guns. I bought a pair of 10-pound dumb bells but I'm no where near ready to hang my arm out the window.

Dom's got a tattoo: *Mom* with a sliding teardrop inside a heart. He wears muscle shirts, so his biceps show it real well. The ladies think he's an orphan. His mom lives in Pasadena, but what the hell. I'm not going to say anything, I'm Dom's friend.

When we shoot pool at Jeff's Tavern most everybody knows me. The chicks want to tousle my hair. "Hey, Billy Boy." They want to lick Dom's ear. Even though he already has Wanda.

Dom's married to Wanda. She's got blonde hair. I know because he keeps her photograph in the visor in the truck. There is something about that picture that gets under my skin; maybe it's her hair parted sideways, or her pink lips so ready.

Sometimes I tell her I'm Dom's sidekick and blow her air kisses. Dom saw me once, smacking at the photograph. Asked what the fuck I was doing. I had to say. "I was telling Wanda how pretty she is."

I think at first he was mad, because he got real quiet, and took the photograph from my hand and put it back in the visor, exactly where it had been. Then it was cool. He said, "Hey, it's just a photo, not the real thing, not even her best side." Like a Hemingway guy.

I know I'm feeling more for her than I should.

Before we heave the Dumpsters over the top of the truck we always check inside. Anything we salvage is ours. Dom totes home broken chairs, old boards, torn sofas and old rugs. He reworks everything, then sells the redone furniture to Mr. Toll, who owns the Junque Shop on the corner of 5th and Main. Used to be Layton's Green Grocer before the A&P opened on the other side of town, near the bypass. Now the aisles are antique booths. Lots of people think someone else's old stuff is worth money.

Me, I think it is trash, but Dom says there's bucks in it. He said the old man is loaded: made his money years ago as a rag picker. So, now I'm rewiring old lamps. I change the switch, fix the old base and buy a lampshade. Mr. Toll is going to sell for me, too.

One Thursday night near Labor Day, just after I got hired on full-time, me and Dom were at Jeff's, drinking brews, eating roast beef sandwiches with horseradish and brown gravy, shooting the shit. We ended up talking about first dates.

His: Sherrie with the knockers. "She was so fine." Dom gestured and thrust.

Mine: Janey with braces. "The blood wasn't so much," I said.

Dom said, "You made that up," laughed, knuckled my arm. "Well, no harm, no foul."

He paid for the next round, even though it was my turn, like we were celebrating.

He invited me to his house for a BBQ. Said he'd dressed a deer last season, had a few steaks left. Said to me, sneaky like, "You'll taste my very very dick-hard homemade apple jack."

"What's up, Dom?" I hoped I didn't sound like that stupid cartoon rabbit.

"Our anniversary. Bring that Linda you are so hot and heavy with."

Truth: Linda and I weren't even lukewarm.

We'd met at the library counter returning books. We were whispering about the fact we were the only people over the age of ten. Linda owed thirty cents, but didn't have her bag. I paid the librarian. Linda said, "Hey, wait for me. I have change in the car."

I followed and took the three dimes from her. We were friendly right from the get go. There's a small bar around the corner from the library, a semi-decent Tex-Mex. Not a franchise, which both of us hate. We had margaritas. She wrote her number on the inside of my hand. I thought that was cute.

The French art film we saw last month was Linda's choice. Not so bad. Pretty damned sexy, actually.

I had let on to Dom that Linda and I were more, not in a way that made her sleazy; in the way that made me feel, well, more like the stud that Sherrie with the knockers would want. I let on we were more, in a way that made me feel I imagined a Hemingway man would.

I'm not saying there was anything wrong with Linda. She surely has a cute ass. It's just that I couldn't think about anything except meeting Wanda.

I wanted to say, *Dom, I don't need a date, ask just me.* Instead I said, "Great, man. Saturday night. Linda's been wanting to meet you."

Linda never said such a thing, but I was pumped - Wanda!

I stopped by the A&P where Linda works. When she's not ringing up on register three, she's in customer service, which mostly means listening to folks complain. I waited for her to finish a rain check for chicken breasts, and leaned on the chipped counter and rushed the invitation.

In response, Linda peered at me from underneath her bangs, as if looking at me through her hair might make my breathless and earnest question more reasonable. "Dinner at your boss's house for his anniversary?"

"Dom's not my boss." I knew she wasn't cool about something. Maybe she wasn't cool with the anniversary part.

"You're inviting me to eat meat that your friend killed?"

Maybe she wasn't keen about the venison. Maybe it was all of it. Maybe she would say no. How would I meet Wanda? "He hunts, and makes applejack. It's a BBQ"

Linda surprised me. "A BBQ. That sounds like fun. I like BBQs.

I said, "We'll head out about five."