

## Arrowhead

She felt good about Tony for the first time in years.

He looked so peaceful there, slumped against the door.

What was that last thing he said? Something about guts. “You don’t have the guts.” Or was it, “You’re a gutless bitch.”

She walked into the kitchen to make another gin and tonic, but found the ice tray empty. She never could get the proper timing for flipping that wire thing that turns it off and on. You flick it up and it produces so much ice that it spills out onto the floor every time you open the freezer door, or you forget to flip it back and the next time you look, the tray is empty except for the few food-particle-imbedded chips or the frozen, polluted leakage that lines the very bottom of the tray.

She hacked away at the fragments for her drink. Should she worry about the yellow-brown color? Chicken blood? You could get salmonella—bird flu maybe. Of course, the alcohol might kill the bugs in the tainted ice if the cold hadn’t already done the job. But viral diseases were more resistant to harsh conditions, oxygen deprivation, or cold or heat, weren’t they? Hadn’t she read that viruses could lay dormant on the moon or Mars if we accidentally dropped some there on our way to the outer planets or the Oort cloud?

She remembered to flip the lever this time and heard immediately, the sound of the already frozen cubes, falling into the tray—a satisfying sound. She searched under the counter for tonic. In the dim kitchen light, eight or nine bottles faded into the dark recesses of the cabinet. She pulled them out one by one, opening each to test the release of gas.

Flat.

She poured the dead liquids down the sink. On the fifth try she lucked out. The bottle sparkled to life when she twisted the plastic cap, quickly becoming too much of a good thing, erupting in a sticky volcano of effervescence, over the refrigerator, the floor, the cabinets, the countertop. She felt a bit too woozy at the moment to worry about cleaning it up thoroughly. Instead she wiped half-heartedly with a dishcloth that still lay nearby on the floor from the last time.

The floor sucked at her sneakers. She frowned at it. Dirty footprints were everywhere. Every time she went out to fetch the paper, she tracked dirt back over the tacky, sweet film until a layer of filth covered its adhesive coating. Now she would have to start all over again. She poured her drink from one of the big plastic gin bottles. They were so convenient now with that handle molded right in. She made a quick survey of her supply. Good. Four bottles left. When the tonic ran out she could switch to water or—straight gin.

She took her drink back into the living room and sat back on the couch to look at Tony, trying to recapture the pleasant feeling she had before she had gone to refresh her drink. His head was tilted slightly to the left and slumped toward his chest. She tried to match the posture with her own head. She put her drink down and attempted to mimic his pose, arms at his side, hands open like Mantegna’s *Dead Christ*. She smiled, thinking about how Tony used to say, “Who am I?” Then he’d lie back on the couch or the bed and hold his hands out like that.

“Um, let’s see,” she’d say. “I know. You’re the dead Christ.” Then they’d laugh and he’d bring her a fresh drink. Sometimes she’d bring a drink down to him in his studio. He liked scotch—rocks with just a splash. Back in those days, Tony bought the best. Macallan eighteen year, single malt. The *nectar of the gods*, he called it. At the art exhibit openings he was always so witty and handsome, even if he never dressed like the people who came to buy his art. It was funny really, watching all those tuxedos and party dresses gather around his jeans and T-shirt. And hadn’t *she* been a dish? She thought about her slinky black dress. A simple string of pearls was all the accessorization she needed. She watched as he fraternized with the society types, his biceps bulging from the rolled up sleeves of his T-shirt, a pack of Marlboros tucked into one. His eye would catch hers occasionally in a look that meant, *just wait till I get you home, babe*.

At home they always laughed about the Marlboros because Tony didn’t smoke. Never smoked a cigarette in his life.

About five inches from one of his open Christ-palms, his tumbler of scotch lay on the floor—Usher’s, a blend, not aged—six-fifty a pint. A single, unmelted cube remained in the glass. His arms no longer supported taut biceps. His thighs, once thick and powerful, with that definition of bulge and crease that athletes’ legs or the legs of ballet dancers display, were thin now. You could easily imagine the bones underlying their loose shroud of flesh. That was funny too. Skinny arms and legs, but in between—a big, pregnant belly.

She would have to do something soon. She would have to move him, but not right now. She sipped at her drink until it was gone. She considered making another, but instead, she passed out.

When she awoke, she didn’t immediately remember everything. Of course, she seldom remembered everything these days. It was a sound that had awakened her. A clapping metallic noise. Of course—the mail slot. Tony’s head was just beneath it and now that she was awake, she saw the second onslaught of mail pour through. The first of it, what passed for real mail these days, bills—due and overdue—collection notices or threats of one kind or another, spilled across his belly and cascaded onto the floor. Next came the heavy stuff—glossy catalogs offering outdoorsy clothing, camping gear, garden tools, handmade furniture, modern home furnishings and all sorts of electronic goodies that she just might order one of these days. This heavy bombardment assaulted Tony’s head, pushing it over a little further before the material slid thuddingly to the floor.

She shoved herself up unsteadily, wobbled her way over to the pile of mail, and selected one of the electronics catalogs. She carried it back to the couch and leafed through it, pausing first at flat TVs, then at treadmills. One of the work-out machines had a drink holder. That would be nice. She certainly could use some exercise. She used to be in decent shape. She thought again about her black dress.

She got up and went to the bedroom closet. The dress was still hanging in there, way back behind the loose frocks or sweat suits, which had become her daily fare. She held it up to herself. The full-length mirror showed lots of leftover body around the outer boundaries of the dress. She sighed and hung it back in its out-of-sight out-of-mind hiding place.

She made herself a sandwich and a new drink. After finishing her sandwich she decided that the time had come. She was going to have to move him. She bent over Tony and pulled with all her strength. He wouldn’t budge. One side of his body came back off

the door a bit but she realized that the other side was stuck. She could scarcely believe that she had done such a good job. She certainly didn't feel that she would ever have the strength to repeat her performance of a few hours earlier.

The feathered end of the second arrow protruded from her husband's chest. The business end of the first one—the stopper—Tony's big surprise—had gone all the way through his left arm and lodged itself firmly into their front door. She could maybe kick at him and break it off, but no. She remembered now, how he had demonstrated the strength of the shafts for her.

"Fiberglass," he had said. "Stronger than steel."

She was going to need a tool. She carried her drink down the steps to Tony's studio. The studio made her sad. He used to keep it so neat. Had a ritual of cleaning up after he finished each painting. There were his old paintings stacked against a back wall. Dust and cobwebs covered them.

"Back to back and face to face," he always told her when she helped move them to a show or to his storage unit, back when they could afford that luxury. She pulled the first three back, looking at the images. She tried to remember the last time she saw these hanging in a public place. Ten years ago—maybe fifteen.

Why had she come down here?

Oh yes—the saw.

Tony's brushes were still in the bowl on his taboret. She tried to pick one up and the entire bowl came up with it. The solvents had long since evaporated, leaving the brush tips flattened to its bottom. But his tools were still in their orderly places on the peg-wall. A neat line-drawing surrounded each one. If a stranger took a tool down from this wall, he could easily relocate its proper place, even if he had no idea of its function or name. She selected a wooden handled saw with an eight-inch blade that tapered to a point.

She sloshed her drink on the way up the steps.

The room felt as cold as Tony's body. She had let the fire in the wood stove burn down. She went back down the steps, back through the studio to the woodpile under the deck. She carried up a few logs and got the fire going again. She sat on the floor in front of it, enjoying its warmth.

"There's nothing like the heat of a good wood fire," Tony always said.

Their stove was small, so small that you had to really struggle to get the wood in, but it was worth the effort. Even with the door closed it was better than a fireplace because you could still see the flames through the glass door and it gave off more heat. She dozed in front of it. When she woke up, it was roaring. She checked the magnetic thermometer on the stove-pipe. The fire was well into the *burn zone* where Tony always said it needed to be. She didn't know why exactly, but if that was where it was supposed to be, she figured that getting it even hotter might be better. She opened the door to see if she could force another piece in. She was greeted by a superheated blast that singed a few loose strands of her hair. She backed away, aware of the smell of burned hair. Some hot coals shot out at her, burning a hole in her sweat suit. A few more landed on the carpet. Using the electronics catalog, she pushed them back onto the tiles under the stove. She jammed another log into the opening and it caught immediately. She was unable to get it all the way in though. She tried to push it in with the door but it wouldn't close now. She

decided to leave the door open until the log burned back. At that moment that she looked over and remembered Tony—with that arrow buried in his chest.

She felt bad about that but then she remembered the saw. She had a job to do. No time for sentimentality. When she reached behind him the tip of the tool made contact with the arrow shaft but she couldn't get enough leverage to make a proper sawing motion. She was so hot. She settled back on the couch and stared at Tony. The hunting bow was still leaning in the corner where she had left it.

She admired the bull's eye-arrow in his chest. She wondered if she could make such a perfect shot again. She thought about all the times she had watched Tony play darts down at the Watering Hole. Once he nailed two bulls then, with his third dart, he speared the feathers of one of the others. She had had a few drinks after all. She picked up the bow and four more arrows and stumbled back to the couch.

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Stacy O'Connor drew the duty for the house-fire on the north side.

"It's a shame," the neighbor said. "They were quiet. Never bothered anybody. Sometimes I'd see her out in the yard, working in her garden. We didn't see him much, except when he went out for groceries and stuff. Always waved."

Stacy tried to interview the cops.

"The incident is still under investigation, Ma'am," the boyish officer said, making her feel older than her twenty-four years."

"Are you suggesting there may have been foul play?"

An older man, in a wrinkled suit stepped in to intercept any further grilling of the young cop.

"Foul play?" he said. He opened a pack of gum and offered her a stick, which she waved off. "You might say that," he said, grinning, chewing. "One of the bodies had six arrows in it."