

Phoenix

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A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

She sat alone. Her table was on the patio where she could see the cars as they pulled into the restaurant parking lot. She waited for him and wondered what to expect.

Vicky knew what to expect, but refused to accept it -- not until he told her. Until then, there was still hope.

Her heart jumped when she recognized his truck pulling in to the lot. There was still hope...

But that hope faded as she saw the way he got out of the truck. His head was down, shaking side to side. She saw his shoulders move and knew he was sighing; she knew the sound of that sigh. She felt tears forming, the lump moving up in her throat.

But then he straightened up, extended his arms up, and laughed.

Her tears disappeared, her brow furrowing in wonder as she watched him walk to the restaurant door.

She turned and stood, waiting for him to walk out onto the patio.

When she saw him, he had the lopsided smile she knew and loved.

As Tom spotted her on the patio, his smile faded even as he made himself stand taller, pulling his shoulders back.

She felt it -- he was trying to be strong, for her, for both of them.

She smelled the acrid smoke as he approached -- his clothing and hair were saturated with it. It had been in the air for days as the fire ravaged the area.

He stepped closer. She held out her hands, and he took them.

She saw the soot on his face, soot interrupted by the trails of tears. As she looked in his eyes, she saw how the soot and tears ended in the outline from a face mask.

Her look was question enough; he sighed once more and his lopsided smile appeared again.

“Look on the bright side -- you’ve wanted to remodel that kitchen ever since we moved in,” he told her, holding her hands close to his chest.

Her tears came freely, mixed with amazement. She curled up in him, letting his strong arms wrap around her, holding her.

She cried, the intensity of the smoke from his shirt making their loss all the more real. She tried to hide in his arms, in his strength, but she couldn't hide from the smoke.

They sat down, still holding hands, looking in each other’s eyes, not saying a word.

Tom noticed someone standing next to the table. He looked up.

“Hey, Pat,” he said to the waiter. Besides being a safe distance from the fire line, this was their favorite restaurant; they knew pretty much all the staff.

Pat nodded somberly. The scene he’d witnessed had been repeated all too often since the fire had started. “Well?” he asked.

Tom nodded, then looked back to his wife. “They let us in for a few minutes to look around. Everything is gone -- not a house, not a tree left standing. They’re still cleaning up some hot spots near the ridgetop.” He looked back to Pat. “You guys lucked out.”

Pat nodded solemnly. “I guess so. We got lucky. At least the winds have died down.”

Tom agreed. “Yeah, that helps some.” He sighed again. “I need a beer.” He looked to his wife. “You want anything?” he asked, squeezing her hands.

Vicky shook her head, still in shock.

Tom glanced at Pat once again. Pat nodded. “Be right up.”

Tom looked back to Vicky, lifting her hands and kissing them. “We’re lucky, darling -- we had a few hours notice, we’re insured... I think some of the stuff we put in the basement may have come through -- it will be a few days before they’ll let us check.”

Vicky shook her head. They’d gotten out some of the important things, a lot of clothes... Other things they’d put in the basement, against the outside walls.

She looked at Tom, remembering how he’d pulled himself up tall, being strong for both of them.

“Who in their right mind would use avocado green tile in a kitchen?” she asked, forcing a smile.

She saw Tom smile, tears at the corners of his eyes. He squeezed her hands and kissed them again.

“We’ll start over,” he told her.

She nodded. They’d start over. It was the only thing they could do.

Pat appeared, putting a large glass of cold beer in front of Tom. “On the house,” he said, and walked away.

Tom picked up the glass, raised it briefly in a silent toast then quickly drained about a third of it. “That helps,” he said, putting down the glass. “How are you doing?” he asked Vicky.

She sighed and took another sip of water. “Dave and Donna have been great. I’ve got most of our clothes unpacked, and Dave says he’ll connect our computers whenever we’re ready. It’s going to be cozy, but they say they’re glad to have us, as long as it takes.”

Tom nodded, taking another gulp. “See how lucky we are? We’ve got a place to stay.”

Vicky managed a small smile. They knew plenty who hadn’t been as lucky, escaping the fire with little more than the clothes on their backs.

Tom put the glass down with yet another sigh.

Vicky looked at him. He looked tired. Neither had slept well, worrying, hoping...

“How about you get out of those clothes, take a shower, and we have a nap?” she asked.

Tom lifted his head a bit, smiling again. “Don’t have to worry about mowing lawns for a while...” He shook his head. He took out his wallet and put a five-dollar bill on the table. “Let’s go, darling,” he said as he stood up, holding his hand out to her.

Arm in arm they walked to the parking lot. They paused for a brief kiss then got in their cars. They drove to their friend’s house, watching a convoy of fire vehicles headed the other way.

They parked in the driveway. As they walked to the front door, Vicky pulled a key from her purse and stopped. “Donna gave me a key, they’re getting one for you. But you, mister, are going to go meet me at the back door. I don’t want you stinking up the house!” She poked her husband in the chest with a finger.

Tom smiled a little. “Yes, dear,” he said, then turned and walked off with a soft chuckle.

Vicky walked through the house to the back door and laundry room. Passing the kitchen, she saw a note on the refrigerator. "Off for groceries -- be back around four." She glanced at a clock. Not even one in the afternoon -- not even 24 hours since they'd been driven from their house.

She opened the clothes washer before she opened the back door for Tom.

"Okay, strip -- clothes in the washer," she told him.

As he emptied his pockets he gave her a smirk. "This could be promising..."

"After you shower -- maybe!" Vicky said.

"Anyone else here?" Tom asked.

"Not for a while," Vicky responded as she loaded his smoke-saturated clothes into the washer. She turned and saw him walking down the hall.

Tom walked down the hall to the guest room. They'd been so lucky -- almost five hours warning, Dave and Donna taking them in. He looked around the room as he crossed to the attached bathroom. Clothes unpacked, the suitcases stacked neatly. Computers, books, files, CDs sat on the floor along one wall. He looked around the small room. For a while at least, this would be home.

In the bathroom, Vicky had things unpacked and organized there too. Tom remembered racing through their bathroom, sweeping the countertop contents into a pillowcase, following it with the contents of the medicine cabinet and the drawers. Opening the shower door, he saw his shampoo and soap sitting on a shelf. "I love you," he whispered, turning on the water.

Vicky stepped into the bedroom. She still had so much to do -- they'd get the rest of the suitcases moved to the basement later; she'd already taken some down. They'd have to do something about a small table...

She sat on the edge of the bed, slipping off her shoes. She'd dumped her shirt in the wash -- it was dirty from the ashes and smoke, just from being held. Starting over -- what would the insurance cover? She remembered the frantic trips up and down the stairs, carrying things down to the basement and lining them up against the outside walls, hoping they'd survive in the event the fire did go that way -- oh how they'd hoped and prayed it wouldn't... She looked at her hands and wiped a smudge of ash from her wedding ring. That was yesterday. Time to start over. Start fresh, from here. "A new world waits inside your dreams -- your heart knows the way" -- isn't that how the song went?

She smiled as she stood up. She undressed as she walked to an old dresser. She took a new red silk nightie out of the top drawer and put it on. With an impish grin she picked up a perfume bottle from the top of the dresser, putting a bit on her neck and between her breasts.

Tom felt a lot better as he dried off. He took a breath through his nose; the smoke was probably going to be with him for a while. Ought to leave the windows in the truck rolled down a bit, he thought. His mind was still racing, wishing he'd taken the digital camera with him or the videocamera -- even though what was left of their house had collapsed into the basement, he felt pretty sure that the stuff they'd lined against at least one wall had been spared.

He looked at himself in the mirror. For a moment, he was looking at someone else as his mind raced on. Then he stopped. "We'll start over," he whispered. He glanced down -- Vicky even had his electric shaver set up. He picked it up and ran it over his face.

As Tom stepped from the bathroom, Vicky stood up. She saw him smile, then a look of uncertainty crept over his face.

She stepped closer, reaching for his strong shoulders. "I hope you don't mind an early birthday present. I got this special for you," she said with a gentle sway.

Tom pulled her into his arms, hugging her tight as tears filled his eyes once more. "Oh, I love you," he whispered, almost sobbing. But they'd made it -- they were safe; that was the important thing. Now the uncertainty about the house was over, and they could start again.

Vicky felt her tears forming as he squeezed her close. How she loved being in his arms.... She felt his tears as he kissed her neck; she held him closer. She felt how much he needed her, and that increased her own need.

Tom took a deep breath, filling himself with the perfume on her neck, trying to drive the smoke out of his nose and his mind. He breathed deep and slow, filling himself and running his hands strongly up her back.

Vicky felt his deep breath at her neck and felt his strong hands moving up her back. She relaxed in his arms with a sigh and started moving back to the bed, letting him ease her down. She felt his need as he kissed her, running his hands over her body then moving closer to wrap himself around her.

Tom drew his hands under her as they kissed, trying to fill himself with her, with her scent, her softness, her warmth.

Vicky felt his hunger. She needed him as well, wanting to reaffirm that they were both still alive. She pulled up her nightie with one hand as she used the other to urge him on top of her.

Tom pressed into her as they kissed. He tried to be gentle, but he needed to lose himself in her, to escape what he'd seen, what they'd been through. Each stroke was a little easier and deeper, until he was in her completely. He slid his hands under her shoulders to pull them together tighter as he drank in the perfume from her neck and kissed her shoulder.

Vicky sighed again, letting him push the breath out of her. She put one hand on the back of his head and slid the other down his back, encouraging his thrusting, closing her eyes and feeling with her whole being. She realized this wasn't going to be a marathon session -- not the way he was going. He felt so good, pounding into her. She moved both hands to the small of his back, touching him the way she knew worked so well to drive him over the edge.

Tom moaned as she pressed on his back. The warmth of her hands, the pressure... He moaned, not wanting it to be so soon, but her hands felt so good, she felt so good. He couldn't help himself.

"Oh good, sweetie," she purred under him, pressing on his back as he moaned. She felt him tightening up, and saw the tension in his face. She shifted her hips and pressed on his back, rocking in time to his motion. She felt him getting close, close, closer, and pressed again, trying to take him in even more.

Tom couldn't hold back, pumping into her as she held him. He opened his eyes to see her smiling beneath him. Most of his body kept moving rhythmically on its own as he leaned down to kiss her again.

Vicky moved her hands up to his head as they kissed, feeling the warmth of his gift fill her. They'd made it. That was the important thing.

Tom moved back to kissing her shoulder, breathing in the perfume on her neck. "Oh darling," he started to whisper.

She held his head. "Shh... It's all right. We're starting over."

FIN
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