# Strained

*by* Amanda Sledz

She wonders if he will do the dishes. He said that he would, but that doesn't mean anything. He said he would do them last week, said he would save money, said he would come home last night. He didn't do any of those things, either.

She doesn't want to ask. It's so boring to ask. Still: she asks. He says he'll do them. He'll do them tonight. And with that, she knows he won't do anything. He's supposed to go to work tonight. Supposed to. Her stomach turns.

He is out of money. That means he's not drunk. It also means she is the bank. He won't recycle bottles for money, won't look for extra work, won't bend over frontwards or backwards or any which way. He'll just say he doesn't have any money, and look at her.

He is late for work. He's not in any particular hurry. He's watching a zombie movie on one screen and reloading websites again and again and again and again on the other. A smartphone is involved somehow, too. She thinks he might be depressed, except that he does this when he's perfectly happy, too. When he's perfectly happy he says that this makes him perfectly happy; when he isn't, he doesn't say anything.

He is even later for work. She wonders what she can do to get him to leave. Without intervention, he will be there all day. He will lose his job. He will get his last paycheck, and give her a few hundred dollars less than his half of the rent. He will say he doesn't have any money, and then he'll look at her.

Her mother calls, and she tells her nothing. She tells her mother that he is sober, even though that's never happened, and he's never really tried. She ignores her mother's comments about dating a


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smoker when she has asthma. She fails to mention buying his cigarettes. She tells her mother than they're doing better financially, but by this she means she spends all her money on him and he spends all his money on him, so they agree. She hangs up the phone.

He announces that he called off sick. She says like yesterday? Her voice squeaks. He doesn't say anything, because he's looking at his computer. He doesn't say anything, because he found her bottle of vodka, and now its nearly gone.

She goes to the bathroom and turns the water on. She listens to the sound of it rushing down the sink, and wonders if her mother ever did this. She thinks: I hate him. She thinks: he will never leave. Not ever.

There is no love in her. She can't remember where she stored it. Her eyes are locked on the sink, on the drain.