

12:00 Somewhere

by Anthony M. Powers

Richard was brushing his teeth in the half-bath when he heard Sarah coming down the hall. Her bare feet slapped with each step on the worn, hardwood floor. He stared at himself in the mirror. The skin beneath his eyes was turning a shade of grey and he noticed a line on his forehead he hadn't seen before. Toothpaste and saliva dripped from his mouth, getting caught in the light brown stubble he tried to pass off as a beard. The paste was turning a shade of purplish brown. He heard Sarah open the door and walk in. She put the seat down and sat on the toilet.

“That dog of yours pissed on the fucking rug again,” she said.

“Which one?” His words gurgled out of his already open mouth.

“We only have one dog.”

“I meant which rug.”

“The one I bought just last week. I swear to Christ, Rich, if you don't get that thing under control, one of these days he's going out with the recycling and not coming back.”

He spit into the sink and saw blood. He turned on the faucet and used his hand to cup water into his mouth. He spit again. He did this a few times and turned the faucet back off. He looked at himself in the mirror again.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“I heard you.” He turned to face her. Sarah was hunched forward, her pajama pants around her knees.

“Do you fucking mind?”

He wiped his hands and mouth on the towel hanging over the shower curtain rod. Then he walked out of the open door, flipping the light off as he went.

“Hey!” Sarah said instantly. Richard flipped the light back on.

“Sorry, babe. Force of habit.”

“And close the door, would you?”

A few feet down the hall, he heard her ass squeak. He walked into their bedroom, turned the light off, and got into bed. He stared at the digital alarm clock next to his head. It was blinking red, 12:00. He watched it blink on and off, red to dark. He heard the toilet flush and Sarah patter down the hall towards him.

“Power must have gone off,” he said as she entered the room. Sarah looked at the clock as she unzipped her sweatshirt and tossed it onto a chair. “Want me to fix it?”

“It's fine,” she said, “I don't have to be at work until 11.” She climbed into bed and pulled half of the covers off of Richard, who didn't even flinch. He felt her situating herself on the bed. She came to a stop lying on her back just a few inches away from him.

There was a moment of silence. Sarah sighed.

“Don't forget, we have to go to my sister's house tomorrow night for Tammy's birthday. I can't believe she's already 9 years old. Time really flies.”

“I thought that was only when you were having fun,” he said.

“Don't be an asshole.”

“I'm just saying.”

“Speaking of fun, I'm going out clubbing with Becky and Trish on Friday night. I'd ask you if you wanted to come, but I already know the answer.”

“Don't you think you're all a little old for that?” Sarah slapped him in the back between his shoulder blades. He just kept staring at the clock.

“What the fuck, Richard?! I'm 26 for Christ's sake, not 60!”

“I'm sorry, that's not what I meant.”

“Then what the fuck did you mean?”

“I don't even know. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.”

“You can be so fucking passive-aggressive sometimes!”

Richard didn't say anything. The ceiling fan was louder than his breathing.

Sarah sighed again.

"I'm sorry," Sarah said. "I think my period's starting soon. You know how moody I can get sometimes."

Why is it, Richard thought, that women are allowed to use that excuse for themselves but if a man ever asks if that's why they're upset, he's the asshole?

Under the blanket, she started rubbing his arm.

"It's fine," he said. "I'm sorry."

The clock kept blinking 12:00.

Her arm slid around his waist as she rolled to her side and pressed herself up against him. Suddenly he felt like he had to pass gas, but he held it in. Sarah lifted up his shirt and rubbed the hair below his belly button. His stomach grumbled in protest of at least one of the two circumstances. She leaned forward and slid her tongue slowly across his ear.

"Well it's not that time of the month *yet*," she whispered. He could hear the smile in her voice. Her hand started to move downward.

"I'm sorry, Sarah. I'm just not in the mood, I guess."

Sarah scoffed and quickly plopped back onto her back, causing the bed to tremor just once.

"You're never in the mood anymore, Richie. What about what *I* want?"

"Let's not pretend like I've ever been good at giving you what you want."

He felt Sarah sit up in bed. He stayed motionless.

"Oh my God!" she said. "You're such a fucking prick! What the hell is your problem tonight?" Richard blinked, but didn't move otherwise. "What? Are you fucking someone else? You're fucking someone else, aren't you?!"

"You're going to wake the neighbors," he said calmly.

"Fuck the neighbors! Who is she, huh? Who? Is it that little, blonde bimbo from the coffee shop? That one you just hired? I bet that's how she got the job. Did she suck you off behind the counter? Was that her first or second interview?"

“Jesus Christ, Sarah. You're acting hysterical. Of course I'm not sleeping with her—or anybody else that that matter.”

“Then *what?*” Her voice cracked. “Don't you *want* me anymore?” Richard heard her start to cry. Still he didn't move, until Sarah gently took his arm and turned him towards her. Her eyes looked shiny in the moonlight coming in through the bedroom window, but he didn't see any tears on her cheeks. “What can I do to make you happy?”

Richard sat up and put his arm around her.

“You make me so happy,” he said. “I'm sorry, Sarah. I didn't mean any of it. Really. I'm just... I'm just so tired. Please don't cry.” He kissed her on the temple and held her close. She sniffled once more and took a deep breath. Richard pulled away and looked down at her.

“I'm sorry,” she said.

She reached her chin up towards him and they kissed.

“Let's just get some sleep,” he said, petting her hair. “It'll all be better in the morning.” She looked up at him and nodded. They laid back down, staying in each other's arms. Sarah kept her head on Richard's chest and closed her eyes. Richard stared at the ceiling fan as it slowly twirled over them.

A little while later, Sarah lightly moaned in her sleep and rolled over to the other side of the bed. Richard rolled back over onto his side. The clock was still blinking 12:00. It wasn't that he was expecting it to change, he wasn't expecting it to be any different. The little red numbers went on and off and on and off again. For the first time in years, Richard wanted a cigarette. Sarah had made him quit 6 months after they started dating in college. He knew that it would pass.

Richard didn't know how long he'd been staring at the clock or how long Sarah had been asleep. He didn't know why Sarah had gotten so upset with him or if he really had a chance of sleeping with the girl from the coffee shop. In fact the only thing he was really certain of was that he apparently didn't know much at all. That, and that it was still 12:00.

