

Lovely

by Craig Lancaster

I didn't want her to go and she didn't want to stay. It was her irresistible force against my immovable object, but I'm going to say now that physics is a liar. It wasn't a stalemate, not at the end. She left, and all my wishing for a different outcome—a comfortable one that didn't change anything—went for naught. She was out of there.

Had I gotten clingy? Yes. You want to make me cop to something I don't want to admit, there it is. I knew she was slipping away from me in small movements. I could feel the distance between us even in half slumber, when my hand would find only a cool sheet where her body used to be. I would open an eye, waiting for it to absorb the scant light in the room, and I would see her on the far edge of the bed, the topography of her hips now a battlement to keep me at bay. I would sidle up and slip my arms around her, and she would pat my hand. Come morning, I would be alone.

Where did we go wrong? I have no idea. Okay, that's a lie. I have some idea, and I'm willing to take on a considerable burden of blame for it. I lost my fuse, okay? I did. I took the test for lieutenant, finally listened to her about getting off patrol and trying to build my career in the department. She could point at a half-dozen guys who'd shared a car with me who had moved up and out. Casey, in particular. She was always bringing up Casey. Chief in North Richland Hills now. Didn't I want that, she asked me.

No, I didn't, but I took the test, and I passed it—I'm not an idiot, okay?—and my captain swung by and said, “Hey, congratulations, Dave. You're finally getting off patrol.” Yeah, well, fuck you very much, you know? I didn't want this. Still, I took a desk in homicide, and I hated it. Homicide is a big clusterfuck, and nobody wins but the lawyers. Patrol was where the juice was. I knew the folks on my beat, knew their businesses, knew their kids and knew what was going down. That moment when you flip the siren on and light out some back street, your synapses firing and your temples throbbing

and your dinner in near revolt? That moment is pure adrenaline. It's a drug. And I wanted it, always.

For two years solid, I sat at that desk, my brain atrophying, and then I came home eight months ago and packed boxes are sitting in front of the door and all the stuff is off the walls—even the big picture from Hawaii, the one where we're looking like a couple of sex gods. I love that picture, and she took it.

“The moving van will be here in the morning,” she said. “I'm spending the night at Amber's.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I can't let myself love a man who doesn't care.”

“I care.”

She didn't say anything else. Irresistible force.

The department owed me seventy-two personal days, and I took maybe eight of them before I went back and asked for a transfer back to patrol. The skipper didn't understand it, but I must have looked like a guy you don't say no to, because he didn't waste more than a minute trying to talk me out of it.

I know where she lives. She didn't try to hide it. She doesn't think I'm a threat to her, and maybe I'm not. Sometimes when I'm running backup on a call and I end up in her neighborhood, I take a swing by. Just to check things out. Just to make sure she's okay. And then I drive back to my zone.

I didn't want her to go. Even now, I want her to come home. I told her that when we signed the last of the papers, when she finally got the divorce she wanted. You'll miss me, I said. You'll be home soon.

You know what she said?

“Isn't it lovely to think so?”

