

Prurient

by Craig Lancaster

When Rusty says to me, “Look, Veronica, I want you to know that my interest in you isn't strictly prurient,” I'm certain of two things.

First, I like him. I really, really like him in a way that I don't like guys, not anymore, not after all the dirty lies into get in my pants, the dirtier lies to get out of them later, the indignities and the humiliations and the disappointments. Which isn't to say that I've lost interest in guys. Guys are wonderful things in moderation, or so I hear. I haven't yet mastered moderation in much of anything, and certainly not guys, but there's still time, I think, which is why I try not to like them, Rusty aside.

Second, he's lying, just like so many guys before him, which surprises me exactly not at all. The thing is, I can't tell if this is the sort of lie that will lead where so many other lies have led, to my feeling broken and used and tossed aside, or if there is something more to this lie, some glimmer of belief on Rusty's part that there is something in me worthwhile, something he wants to get closer to before he has to tell the truth and admit to me that, yes, his interest in me *is* strictly prurient but that I'm also an awesome chick and he knew it all the time. I would be OK with that, and somehow, I have to let him know.

He looks a little bit like Jeff. That was what I noticed when Rusty first talked to me last week here at the Libertine. It's the way his jaws come together in a perfect point at his chin, as if the pieces of his face are locked together like Legos. I didn't want to talk to Rusty at first because of this, because Jeff was horrible to me, and Rusty reminded me of him. Jeff threw an alabaster vase full of potting soil at me, directly at my head, and only because he can't even get something like that right did it miss and shatter instead against the refrigerator. It fell to the linoleum in my kitchen, a debris trail of broken glass and dirt and plant life heading for death. I left it there for a week, long after Jeff left for good, because it was the only vestige I had of him. It took me a long time to get over that, and

Rusty looking like Jeff was a mark against him from the start. But then he smiled, something Jeff rarely did, and I saw that he didn't look so much like Jeff at all. That was good, and so I smiled, too.

Rusty told me that he was an obesity researcher at the Southwestern Medical Center, and I believed him, and I never believe guys. But come on, obesity researcher? Nobody would make up something like that. I pointed at a fat bitch at the end of the bar and suggested that he talk to her instead, and he laughed and said it wasn't like that, and anyway, something called Occam's Razor told him that if she drank light beer and avoided the Hog Wings, her problem would probably be less acute. I asked him what the fuck Occam's Razor is, and he laughed again and told me that was a tool of deduction, whatever that is.

Anyway, tonight, he came back to the Libertine, and he remembered me and I remembered him, and we've been chatting — chatting, what a silly word — for a few hours and now he's telling me that his interest in me isn't "strictly prurient." I still think he's adorable and I still think he's lying, but I don't need to sort any of that out tonight, do I?

"What is your interest, strictly speaking?" I ask.

"To walk you home," he says.

"It's a long walk."

"No, it isn't."

"How do you know?"

"You told me, last week. You said it's two blocks away, right here on Greenville. Were you lying?"

I wasn't lying.

"I wasn't lying," I say.

"So are you ready to go?" he asks.

I am.

"I am," I say.

November slaps us dead in the face as we leave the Libertine, and he asks if he can put his arm around me seeing as how it wasn't this cold when he came in and he didn't bring a jacket to offer me.

"Yes," I say.

And we're walking, and his arm has pulled me in closer, and I can smell him now, can smell the Irish Spring he scrubbed onto his body this morning. I like it. I like him. He's beautiful and he likes me back. Still I'm cold, and Rusty says he heard there's supposed to be an ice storm coming.

And I think, ice storm or not, I'm not bringing the plants in off the terrace.

