

Deep Pockets

by Cynthia Hawkins

Garage-sale variety olive-green corduroy, elbow patches, hems too short. His jacket pocket produced answers one afternoon like strips of paper from cracked fortune cookies. The pocket on the right, to be exact. It had been an ordinary jacket, but then as he stood on the corner of Huisache and Market Streets, angled toward the vast parking lot and pausing to pinch the bridge of his nose, eyes closed, he was thinking, *what the hell have I done?* And the second he jammed his hands into his jacket pockets the right one answered with a small paper ribbon lapping at his knuckles. He thumbed it free. Unfolded it. *You have made an ass of yourself*, it read in the small, even print of capital letters. At first, he'd thought announcing a weight-loss competition for the women of his office had been a good idea. Now his pocket confirmed what the sick sprawl in his ribs and Annette Demarcolo's middle finger had told him already. It was not.

What should I have for dinner? He tried again, thinking his question.

Vodka martini, his pocket said.

What's my name?

Derek.

Why'd that neighbor kid unstring my doorbell and plug it with marshmallows?

Nothing in response. Empty pockets.

What lottery number will be next to win?

The lining rumpled as he twisted his hand in deep.

Nothing again.

So there were limits.

Why did I eat the marshmallows out of the doorbell before I fixed the short it made? He asked.

You were teaching the kid a lesson, was the right pocket's response.

Did he learn it?

Silence.

Did I learn it?

No, said the paper that materialized in the pocket.

There were limits to what he could ask his right pocket, then, he decided with a knowing squint behind his aviator glasses as he steered his car onto Market Street. *Why am I so goddamned handsome?* He asked in thought with a laugh. At the stoplight, he dug the paper from his pocket and read the answer with a diminishing grin.

You're not.

He slumped in his seat, the slip of paper flitting free. The light changed. His car remained unmoved. In the big silence squeezing in on him, he thought, *Why am I alone?* This was a rhetorical, but the pocket rustled. Cars behind him honked.

Vodka martinis, the paper fresh from his pocket read.

He stared down at the words through another cycle of lights, and then his side mirror grew dark with the figure of a man pushing denim cuffs up his forearms. Derek scabbled for the door locks too late and was yanked out by the lapels. Hand in his pocket, he asked, *what do I do now?* And the curl of paper, stuck to his clammy palm, read, *stand still*. He could hear the thin smacks of fists like it was somewhere else, a sound on a radio two cars away, perhaps. When he could focus again he realized he was staring down at a string of blood and saliva connecting his lip to the asphalt. There were sirens. A small crowd clustered along the curb. Imagining himself on the nightly news and Annette Demarcolo spewing her drink between her fingers in a laugh, he crawled back into his car and drove fast.

Yet he found himself on Annette's lawn, his car parked, half-cocked on the curb. He ripped off the jacket and threw it into the shrubs clumped under the front windows. He'd driven by here many times and never stopped, thinking as he'd steered past that these same shrubs would have been a good place to hide, right where the drapes gap and the slim vision of Annette in hot-rollers and a slip slurping a Red Bull would surely present itself. Pacing, rumpling his

hair, cleaning his nose with his sleeve, he stopped, leaned to his knees, breathed. *What am I doing here?* He eyed the jacket. Took slow steps to where it lay, tangled and twisted. Poked at it with the toe of his dress shoe. Then he rifled through the pockets with the gusto of a criminal.

You're going to tell her you're in love with her.

His breath made the paper in his fingers flutter when he asked, "Should I?" He slipped the jacket back on and tried the pocket as Annette's car came over the gutter at the end of the driveway with a thump.

Absolutely.

Dropping the paper on the lawn, he turned to watch as Annette rose from the passenger door, her mouth open, jaw aslant. She clutched her purse, her keys to her chest. Everything in her hands moved with her breath. "What the hell?" Her voice cracked.

"Annette," he said, his hand outstretched. "I'm in love with you."

"That's it!" She hurried toward her front door.

"Something's wrong with you and I'm filing another complaint and if you're not off my lawn in five seconds," she said as the front door closed over her puckered face, "I'm calling the police, asshole." Then she stepped aside, into the window, holding the drapes back long enough to point at him and then mime a cut throat. The drapes fell shut again.

He smoothed his hair back. Straightened the lapels. Made his way to the car. As his hands ran down the length of the jacket, he felt something suddenly lumped in the left pocket. A piece of paper, big and folded in random, frantic angles, letters like magazine scraps in a ransom note. *Stop listening to him, it read. He hates us.*

