

Ten Reasons

by Dallas Woodburn

1. The lacy red panties she discovers wedged between the back left and middle seats of the Jeep Grand Cherokee while reaching down to yank out the seatbelt that always disappears into the crack between the seats. Abe usually drives the Jeep, but this is LeAnn's week to drive Miles and his friends to soccer practice, so he took the Prius instead.

Her breath catches at the feel of the cheap silk lewdness between her fingers. What a silly, stupid cliché. She manages to ball up the panties inside her clenched fist and slip them into her purse without Miles or his friends seeing them.

2. When she buys a new dress on sale at Macy's, with a low-cut neckline and a flattering belt that cinches at the waist, and she puts it on and saunters up to her husband, stretched out across the couch reading the newspaper, and asks, "How do I look?" with a coy smile on her lips, Abe glances up for only a moment before muttering, "Fine," and turning back to the newspaper.

3. "What's wrong?" she asks on a Tuesday night during dinner, noticing how he picks at his food like a child.

He sighs. "Nothing."

"Don't lie to me."

"Your mashed potatoes," Abe says. "They're too lumpy."

"I made them the same way I've always made them."

"Maybe you should add more milk," he says. "Next time."

4. He used to wear cologne when they went out, the two of them, but as the years passed and their romance ebbed into quiet domesticity, he wore it less and less, until the bottle grew dusty in the medicine cabinet. Then, one night — and then another, and another — he comes home late from work and she catches the scent of his cologne when she kisses him hello.

5. She kisses him hello on the cheek now, not on the lips. He doesn't seem to mind.

6. "My mother called today," LeAnn says. "She wants us to visit for Thanksgiving."

"I can't. I have to work."

"But — Abe, it's *Thanksgiving!*"

His voice steamrolls over hers. "I can't take a whole week off to visit your mother in Palm Springs. You and Miles go by yourselves."

"She'll want to see you, too."

"C'mon, LeAnn. Your mother's never liked me."

"Of course she likes you! She loves you! She was just worried, at the beginning." LeAnn stares at him, but he is looking past her, out the kitchen window at the bare, late-October garden. "We were so young to get married."

"Too young," he says.

"My mother just, you know — worried. She didn't want you to break my heart."

Abe smiles a pained half-smile and leaves without even pecking her a tight-lipped goodbye on the cheek.

7. There was a time they kissed hungrily, greedily, achingly. Then there was a time they kissed gently, sweetly — less passionately, perhaps, but no less filled with love.

Those times are hazy now. When LeAnn thinks about the last time they made love, it is like recalling a story told to her about someone else.

8. When he says he loved her, he doesn't look her in the eye.

9. On her 46th birthday, when Abe says he has to work late and she decides to surprise him at the office with a chocolate cake, she instead finds a naked young redhead straddling him on his desk.

“I think I have something of yours,” LeAnn says to the woman, calmly pulling the lacy red panties from the mire of coupons, Wintergreen Lifesavers, pens without caps, bobby pins, aspirin bottles, dusty Kleenex, and Miles's Lego pieces in her purse. She hurls the underwear at the two sweaty wide-eyed faces, as if lace is something that can strike and maim. The panties land harmlessly a couple feet from her, marooned in beige office carpet.

Abe doesn't run after her. When LeAnn arrives back home, she feeds the chocolate cake bit-by-bit down the garbage disposal.

10. The chocolate-cake mix Abe sets out on the kitchen counter the morning of her birthday. “I'll bake it for you when I get home from work,” he says. “My treat. I might be late again tonight, though — we've been swamped at the office lately.”

LeAnn tells herself it's the thought that counts, but Abe is the one who likes chocolate cake. He knows she likes vanilla best.

