

Justify

by David James

When we would leave her place I never had a firm idea where I was taking her except I knew - and she knew - that eventually we'd end up back at my place. We did this a lot when her husband, Mack, was out of town. Every couple of weeks his job took him to Dallas, usually for three days. While we were out we'd drink a beer or two and I'd always stop at a 7- Eleven, pick up another six pack and take it with us back to my condo. I think she liked that amber liquid as much she liked me.

We mostly just drove around aimlessly for a couple of hours listening to the radio and talking. She liked country music and I was ok with it, so we listened to her music. Shortly after we first met I parked my car at the lake and we went over and sat on top of a picnic table. She talked about what she referred to as Topic A: the underside of her marriage. She sat there fooling with the hem of her shorts and told me it was on a ragged edge and had been for a long time.

She said her feelings for Mack hit a wall about three years ago when she saw him at one of his family's gatherings, kneading the shoulders of his cousin, Lois. Later, that same evening, out on the driveway slab, she saw them hugging, really squeezing each other and Lois kissed him, not a "cousin" kiss but a long, lover's embrace.

Back home that evening when she asked him about Lois he blanched but opened up and spilled that when he and Lois were in their teens they had a long, physical relationship that was easier for him to let go than for her. She was still struggling with it. Mack said he'd put it all behind him when they got married. He told her Lois married, too, but the guy she married was a flake and her marriage came apart in short order. After a brief pause she said, "So that justifies why you were kissing her now?" Mack winced and turned

away.

Sitting there, on that shaky picnic table, I took another sip of beer.

