

the break up

by Jerry Ratch

Well I, for one, knew immediately what these great muffled sobs were coming from the parking lot behind our apartment complex. This stud named Clint was dumping one of his girlfriends, again. Exactly how many were there? Could have been a dozen, for all anyone knew around the damned place. (This was when I was living for awhile in my little Hillside apartment, before you came over to see me that one last time.) There had to be at least five of this stud's girlfriends, since he'd moved in. That much was a certainty.

There was this same little dark-haired one, I remember, who was sobbing now. She was the first to come over, the very first night he moved in. She had parked her small blue car in one of the parking spaces out front by mistake. He hadn't told her to pull around behind the building, where visitors were supposed to park. She'd been just sitting there for half an hour in her car, unable to move, gripping the steering wheel as though she'd been driving across half the state on ice. Her hands were the smallest, whitest, bony little hands. They looked more like a pair of white patent leather gloves that little old ladies wore, without a crease. The kind that were worn for show, on special outings, not for protection from the cold. I remember feeling kind of sorry for her right off because, I don't know, she sort of reminded me of myself. Then she seemed scared to get out of her car. That was the first night Clint spent in his apartment. But now, in the parking lot behind the apartment complex, she was really getting it.

He patted her on the back. She let out with an even louder wail, and he backed away somewhat, keeping her at arm's distance. You could see her chest really heaving and agitated. Her breasts stuck straight out like a shelf, but they weren't doing her any good now. Why not, Clint? Look at her. You could have all this, and more. She

would give him all there was of her, he could have it all, he could just take it. Everything. She would gladly give up everything now, but he wasn't going back. Clint only moved forward. He didn't accept mistakes, and she had made some. (This was bringing back some tough memories, for me.)

She sobbed great moaning sobs, and her chest heaved and shook up and down under the heavy white sweater she had on. He bent forward stiffly, leaning down to plant a kiss on her forehead. She threw her small white hands around his neck, clinging to him, but he drew back. She let out with an awfully large wail, for such a small-framed girl. This was hurting her. She had made the mistake of parking her car behind his building, and going shopping before he came home from work. How bad was she, really? She returned with a small package, and surprised him when he drove up the driveway to park his motorcycle. That was all.

Now he hurried away down the driveway. He'd shaken his head No, and left her sobbing next to her small blue car in the parking lot behind the building. An array of large yellow fig leaves were scattered over the lot. It had rained hard the night before. You could still smell the iron in the air.

Early the next day, after Clint left for work, there was another girl named Marlene (or something like that,) a tall thin one with long brown hair and faintly crossed blue eyes, sitting on his patio in sunlight, smoking a long brown cigarette. She was surveying the things around her as she sat, satisfied even if it was momentary, listening to her own elevated, fleeting thoughts. Savoring the most important moments, tasting what his life was like here, sitting in his patio chair beside the low table and the hurricane lamp, the abalone shell ashtray, an array of potted plants.

You could see her smile the sort of smile that bloomed slowly, spreading over her face like a soft pastel glow. Like the insistence of

sap in a branch. Like a plum blossom after snow. Whether this was her destiny, she did not know, but there was a certain thrill to it. She was his preference for now. And that was good enough for her. (She reminded me somehow of Sharon, after me. But then again, Sharon got hers too, poor thing. Well, okay, mixed feelings about that!)

