

Cinderella's Lament

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

My name is Wanda McClure and I lived in the foothills of Eastern Kentucky; a small town miles off the interchange, mostly in the middle of nowhere. I lived in a trailer. I was 52 years old. My unemployment brought me 388.00 a week before taxes, and the rent was cheap. I did a nice little thing with matching the rugs to the linoleum of the kitchen floor, and added some ceramic figurines I bought on the home shopping network, along with a painting. I'd been out of a job for six months.

Each day I sat in front of a computer, eight hours maybe nine, sending out resumes. I used about twenty different websites. I took an online skills test which rated me as a beginner. So that got depressing. Sometimes I took my coffee out on the porch just to get a breath of fresh air. I might've lived in the middle of nowhere, but I still loved it. Even now, just thinking about the cicadas in August, makes me happy. And that makes me think about how still and quiet it would get after the first snowfall.

For about two months, I had a ritual for Friday nights that really kept me going when things were bad, and things were bad for a long time. The sun would go down, and I'd put on a emerald green blouse with silver-tone buttons, *home shopping, thank you very much*, and skin tight blue jeans I would never wear out in public. I got dolled up. I made sure I had a nice cold bottle of white wine. I turned off the computer, lowered the lights, and ordered a pizza.

The buzzer would ring at 8:00 p.m. on the nose.

"Hello," I'd call out. Like I was Juliet or something. It was totally a riot.

A deep voice, "Pizza delivery."

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But of course I knew it was Henry bringing my mushroom and onion pizza. And he wasn't a kid, he was 50. It was a part-time job he'd picked up months ago when he got laid off. Something kind of sparked between us one night.

"Come on in," I'd holler, "the door's unlocked."

He'd be sweating because it was the middle of July. And he wasn't Prince Charming by any stretch of the imagination. He might've been a quarterback in high school, but those days he was pushing 300 pounds. So he'd stand there, his brow beaded with sweat, his gut hanging over his belt--- dusty boots, smelling like garlic, but he'd always say,

"Mrs. McClure, you look lovely this evening."

I used to think God, that's it, isn't it? That's all a body needs. Its not complicated. Sometimes he'd rip off every button on my blouse. They flew all over the kitchen, hitting the walls, the floors, the ceiling. Of course after he left, I found every single of them, and sewed them back on for the next time. But the sheer audacity of it. It was purely animal. We did it on the kitchen counter, on the table, once on the rug (never again) and even on the john. Also the bed.

We would never say much. We were both still married. Frederick wasn't coming home anymore. I knew that. Henry's wife? She was a boozier. Beyond that I didn't know, and didn't want to know. It was just a game we played on Friday nights in the backwoods of Kentucky. But this is what gave me the strength to go on every day, sitting in front of a computer screen, five days a week, eating a cup of noodles for lunch, and ordering up cable when I ran out of money for gas.

It was a tough, mean time, and it could be humiliating. But I had my Friday nights, and that was my everything; for awhile at least. One night, he showed up fifteen minutes late, and told me he wasn't going to be delivering pizzas anymore, he'd gotten a job, his wife wasn't drinking anymore, and now we had to act like adults. This from a man who pretended to be an 18 year old virgin delivery boy. Who fought off my advances with pleas of--- Please, miss, I'm saving it for my wedding night. Quite a performance.

To say I was speechless, *told to act like an adult*, is an understatement. I opened the screen door, and pointed the way out. But, he came at me all sexy, and said, why you got to get all mad. We can do it one more time, for old time's sake, that's not gonna hurt anything. I said, it'll hurt a lot of things. More than you know. And I prefer a nice clean break. I'd really like you to leave. But he had to be an idiot, and try to kiss me, after I'd said no. My hand shot out, picked up a skillet and without even thinking, I hit him over the head. But I didn't kill him.

He was just bleeding and crying in my kitchen. Apologizing. I told him, if the game was over, he wasn't getting any. He agreed. I put ice over the cut, and didn't argue with him when he said the pizza's on the house. I asked him, as he was leaving, what are you going to tell your wife? You got a big cut on your forehead. He said, I'm just gonna tell her it was a bad night. And then he was out the door.

Later, when I was cleaning up, I found a 100.00 bill tucked beneath the pizza box. For some reason that was more humiliating than food stamps and unemployment. *Prince Charming had paid me*. I found my ultra-secret stash of sleeping pills. I counted as I swallowed them; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight--- and that's the last thing I remember. But I didn't kill myself. When I woke up, it was morning, a radiant blue sky. Then I threw up all over my favorite blouse, which wasn't missing a single button.

