

The Garage Sale

by Marcie Beyatte

He didn't want to be there. But he had nowhere else to go.

He watched from the sidelines while his almost ex-wife took charge and bossed him around for what he hoped would be the last time. He lived in the house they owned together. She was the one without a home now, sleeping on friends' couches after living in Italy for the past year. *Vacationing* he liked to call it, knowing how angry it made her.

She was back for the summer to finish their divorce and to sell their house. She had bought a return ticket for September so she was determined to finish her projects. Like she always did, without considering anyone else.

She excelled at plowing forward. He excelled at staying in one place. Eventually the distances got too great and she put an ocean between them.

This garage sale was her idea. Of course. She was the one with the ideas, he went along for the ride because he couldn't think of anything better to do.

She didn't want to lug the debris of their thirty-year marriage to Goodwill.

"Let's put it all in the driveway and see what happens. Even if we give it away for free, it's easier than hauling it away."

The professional junk dealers arrived first. They examined the cracked pottery barn dinner plates, framed but faded travel posters, lemon zesters and melon ballers with disgust-tinged pity. There were no heirlooms or monogrammed towels here.

He pretended they were a happy couple. He told people they were selling their stuff and their house before they moved on to a new phase in their marriage, *Overseas*. She glared at him.

When his back was turned she told these strangers, "He's confused. We're getting a divorce. *I* live in Italy. He tells people *he's* moving to Italy. But really. He's going nowhere. At least not with me."

As if these people cared. They just wanted to buy their cast offs at the lowest price. If she liked them, they got whatever they wanted for free. But if she didn't like them, she raised the price and refused to negotiate.

They had one fight when she told someone the price of an iced tea pitcher was one dollar.

He said, "She's wrong. It's twenty—five cents."

She told him then that he could manage the sale on his own. She went inside.

But of course she came back after five minutes. He apologized.

The money jar was stashed in the clothes dryer in the laundry room. It was close to the garage and safe because who would ever think to look there?

All day they stuffed one-dollar bills, fives, tens and even some twenties into the jar.

Sometimes she could hear him cursing as he searched for change.

But she knew she didn't have to fix things for him anymore, let *him swear all he wants* she thought.

At the end of the day they divided the spoils: Four hundred dollars each.

For him, cigarette and booze money for almost a month.

For her, it was one hour of consultation with her lawyer.

Thirty years ago she was sure she was in love.

Thirty years ago he was sure he had no better option.

Now she questions her judgment. He pours another glass of wine and thinks about the girls riding their vespas in Florence.

