

A Little Idea

by Miguel Lasala

"If you're looking for Ness, she's not here," Jim says.

"I'm not looking for Ness."

"And you can tell her not to come around here no more when you do. I have reasons to believe she's been stealing."

"Stealing what?"

"Steaks."

"Steaks?"

"Yes sir, meat out of my freezer."

Jim points to his tool shed. The door is open and the freezer is grinding away in the night. He was set up for the summer with elk steaks and deer sausage, and now he's missing a half dozen pounds of each. "You think it's a coincidence? Just when Ness starts poking her head around my place?"

"I didn't come here to talk about steaks."

"What did you come here for then?"

"I've decided to fix my truck someplace else."

"And what about the labor I got tied up on your vehicle?"

"I'll pay you for your time if it's reasonable."

Jim isn't interested in reasonable. He'll give me my keys after I give him one hundred dollars and all of his missing venison.

When I get back to my trailer Ness is still on the little couch where I left her. Her dirty feet are up on the coffee table.

"Where's it at?"

"Where's what at?"

"Don't bullshit me, Ness."

She doesn't know what I'm talking about. I look in the freezer then I look for the ice chest. "Where's Jim's steaks?"

She thinks it's the funniest thing she's ever heard.

"I'm guessing if I go down to Cindy's she won't know anything about this either?"

"Of course not." She's laughing like a mean animal now. I see only the red in her mouth as she opens it and let's the laughter out.

I pour myself a glass of water, drink it, then put on my jacket and walk out the little plastic door of the camper.

Outside everything about the night appears calm. The bright sound of cicadas nearly block out the rush of the constant highway traffic coming from I-10, and I can see Cindy's van isn't parked in front of her trailer. Inside, the kitchen light is on.

I stand on her front step and listen carefully. No footsteps are rocking the trailer. No television noise can be heard. I touch the doorknob, wait a few seconds, then open it with a sharp click and a little idea about what to do next.

