

A New Woman

by Miguel Lasala

George was doing his dishes when the phone rang.

“Hello. No thanks. Hey, I know you have a job to do buddy, but hear me out.”

The man on the other end kept talking. George walked across the kitchen then said, “Listen, my woman just came back home after a two-month stint in a Costa Rican Bordello. You think I'm in the mood to talk about vacuum cleaners? I don't need a new vacuum cleaner man.

I need a new woman.”

The line went dead.

George put the receiver down and thought about calling Martha, his ex-wife. He hadn't talked to her in two years. For the first six months after the divorce he stared at walls and imagined while laying

in bed that outside his window there was a black hole that would eventually suck him out of his skin and into some kind of oblivion; but there was nothing out there but the mailman knocking on the door.

Eventually, while walking around George let Martha go. It actually felt more like she let him go, and yes, there were other women in the

world after all. And a few nights later at The Red Garter, George met Cindy.

Cindy had good legs and a friendly smile. She drank champagne and talked with her hands. That first night he reached down and took her

heel out of her high-heeled shoe and squeezed her ankle as they drank together.

George was an expert at guessing a woman's height and weight, but usually he only mentioned height with an inch or two added.

“I know you baby, better than you think. You're five foot two and a

hundred and forty four pounds of pure....”

“Pure what?” Cindy asked cutting him off.

“Pure woman,” he told her while smiling over his beer.

She looked him over and said, “You’re good. I’m 140 now, but last week, before my new diet, you would’ve been right on the money.”

“Well honey, last week I was in jail, so it wouldn’t have mattered.

They took my money and gave me orange flip-flops.”

But now Cindy was back in the country and sitting on the couch.

Her

legs hadn’t been shaved for a week when George ran his hand up

her

leg.

“Please stop, you make me feel ugly.”

But George wouldn’t stop rubbing her legs. “Come on baby,” George said, “maybe I should call the landlord over and see if your ass will cover at least half the rent.”

George didn’t move when Cindy punched him in the nose. He just stood

up and walked to the fridge, poured a glass of water and dropped a few

ice cubes into the glass. The ice cracked in the glass as he walked back to the couch.

“You’re a real son of bitch sometimes George,” Cindy said.

George took a drink.

“You know how much I owe baby. God knows you don’t have any money.”

George felt the blood hardening on his lips.

“Well, aren’t you gonna clean yourself up?”

“No.”

“And why not?”

“Because I can do what ever I want.”

“Is that so, and what are you going to do?”

George thought it over. When the pressure was on to take a stand, it didn’t mean it was any easier. He wanted to say something mean, maybe

he wanted to kill her, but something else made him want to comfort her.

"Well don't just sit there grinning like a damned fool," Cindy said. George ran his fingernails across the leather like blood on his face and thought about his first fight in grade school. T.J. Macdonald pulled his shirt over his head and broke his nose in front of everyone that mattered.

"So this is how it works," George said in a whisper. "At least there's a certain symmetry to it."

"What's that George?"

"Nothing, just bring me a beer."

"We're out of beer."

George found his keys and wallet after washing his face.

"Can I get you anything at the store, babe?"

"Get me some cigarettes."

"Sure thing."

After stopping at the gas station, George drove for four hours without stopping. When he got home the lights were off and the house was dark

and the phone rang.

"Hello."

The call was a recorded message. The woman's voice wanted to know if the owner of the house wanted to answer a survey. George sat down in his chair, took his shoes off, and waited for the instructions.

