

Scar

by Rick Rofihe

Patty told me that when Cal got sent over to France, where his company's head office is, for six months, right away he sent her back a bunch of European chocolate bars. "How did they *taste*?" she answered him over the phone. "I was missing you so much I ate them like a wolf and got my period an hour later. That means *I* didn't eat them, Cal, my hormones did. So I'm not sure if they tasted good."

Since Patty got the lumpectomy, she won't sleep with anyone but Cal, because he was the one who went with her to the hospital and wasn't surprised when he saw the scar.

Cal gets back for good in October; their wedding's in November. "This will be a marriage that makes *sense*," she's always telling me, her buddy, Suzanne—I'm long divorced. It's hard for each of us to believe it's going to be her first marriage, considering that she hasn't ever spent much time by herself.

"Twenty-four hours, Suzanne. I wasn't even sixteen when that's what I was feeling I wanted to do, spend twenty-four hours with a boy. I wasn't thinking *all* of it in bed, but that's pretty much the way it usually turned out. Even back then I couldn't stand to be *alone*, Suzanne. I'm sorry, but for all the time up to Cal I was, I was easy. Now *you're* easy, Suzanne. *Relatively*."

Twenty-four, forty-eight, seventy-two hours. Bedroom, bathroom, sometimes the kitchen, and back to the bedroom. "It's a *power feeling*, Suzanne." Then in the first apartment she got herself, she bought a waterbed, a heated one. "But even with these itty bitty moves of mine, sometimes I'd start to sweat so bad, Suzanne, I'd have to turn the sucker off."

For a long time now, Patty's had it figured out she can't have kids. Something to do with the last of those five abortions. Up to the third, she was still living at home, sharing a room with her little

sister who—Patty finally had to explain it all to her—didn't even know what an abortion *was*.

“If I couldn't have my own kids, I always had other people's, didn't I, Suzanne?” She means my three, all taller than Patty now. “Rhonda I remember when she was just a tiny girl. Tommy was a baby in diapers. And Kelly, the little jigger—I said to her, ‘See you round like a doughnut,’—what was she, five? And she says back *instantly*, ‘Like a cup of coffee. Like a pizza. Like a bagel....’ *Smoke gets in your eyes*, Suzanne. I'll be forty-one years old and crying at my own wedding.”

It was after about only thirty-six hours with Cal, when she was in the shower, that she felt the lump. He *was* divorcing at the time. The operation was three weeks later. That's when she started thinking that finally getting married would make perfect sense.

“Su falls in love, Patty doesn't fall in love. For how long have we known each other—really sixteen years? *Good* girl, you. I was always *bad*, Suzanne.”

The wedding reception will be small, in the city, at my place. “On a *Sunday*,” Patty had insisted. A dry reception afterward—fruit drinks and soda only. “I was drunk last Sunday night. *I can't believe people drink on a Sunday night.*” She kept saying it to everyone at the bar. “*I sleep a week for every night I drink.*” Everybody kept buying and she kept drinking. “*I am not going to make it to work tomorrow.*” Everybody at the bar was killing themselves laughing and she never said out loud anything about Cal who wouldn't be back for months or the wide, raised purplish line on her blue-white breast that was never, ever going to go away.

“People look different right up close, don't they, Suzanne?” Patty had seen Cal several times from a distance and hadn't thought much of him. But when he took her for a walk one night after the bar closed, she kept falling into him and looking up at his face. “I wanted to go home and write him a letter to tell him what he looked like up close, Suzanne.”

Cal has a weekend place, an old house out in the country. Once, he left Patty there alone overnight and when he got back the next afternoon he found her blacked out from drinking almost a whole fifth of whiskey straight from the bottle. She had on his flannelette pajamas, her hair was standing on end, she was on the floor propped up by pillows and the TV was up as high as the remote would take it. Cal got so angry he grabbed all her clothes and threw them out over the front yard. "And then I was a hangover case—it must have taken me fifteen minutes to pick my blue wool sweater out of the thorny bushes the next day, Suzanne. I'd *take* the twelve-step program, I would, if it wasn't for the Jesus thing."

It's a marriage that makes sense to Patty and she has it all planned. After the ceremony and the reception, it'll be just like any other trip to Cal's old house in the country, except for the plastic carnations decorating the car. She'll say *she* wants to drive, and then kick off her shoes. "You can't drive in high heels, Suzanne, you start jerking the car. But in some places it's illegal to drive in bare feet!"

Before starting the engine, Patty always looks at herself in the rear-view mirror. Will her wedding day have been a bad-hair one? Will her lipstick be still on just her lips?

It's only about an hour's drive to get out there, but about half-way she always has to pee. "So bad I can taste it—I don't know why, Suzanne. Even if I go before we start. It's like my kidneys know where they're going and are thrilled by the trip."

So Patty will pull over to the side of the road. When she gets out and goes to squat behind the car, Cal will slide over into the driver's seat. "That's my baby," or something like that, she'll say to him as she climbs back in.

Patty knows a lot of what's going to happen when they get there: they'll pull the car up close to the house, and Cal will carry her up the two steps to the porch and then over the threshold.

"I'll phone you right away, Suzanne, I promise. I wonder how I'll *feel*. I wonder what I'll *say*." Last summer when she phoned me

from there for the very first time, she said it was way, way out in the middle of nowhere and no one could smell it or hear it or see you—"The *barbecue*, Suzanne!"—she meant there were no neighbors for the smoke to bother, you could cook outside with the music up loud all night long and even go around without a shirt on, though she would never do that.

