

Now Lay in It

by Ted Laramie

The phone rang again at midnight. Maury sat straight up in bed, a reflex from his days in the barracks. Linda, his wife, was already sitting up. In the hint of moonlight, she dabbed her nose with a wadded tissue and made helpless little noises. Maury put his hand on her bent knee and squeezed. Her leg leaned in for the small comfort.

"Don't think of it," he said.

"Can't I answer it? He'll just keep calling. I'll tell him not to call again," she said.

Maury withdrew his hand, threw himself onto his side, and jerked the blanket over his shoulder.

"No contact," he said. "I won't have it."

Linda sniffled and moaned gently, with sorrow.

"Well then can we at least unplug the telephone?" she asked.

Murray stiffened his short legs. He wasn't but five-foot-five. Below his toes, the bed seemed to go on forever, like deep ocean water. He drew his legs close and crossed his ankles.

"I won't have it. It's my telephone and I won't unplug it. He'll either take his medicine or he won't, but the telephone stays just the way it is. Nothing changes."

Linda got out of bed and her feet fell into her slippers, naturally.

Maury, sitting up sharply, threw the covers off his body as though he might come after her.

"Where are you going?"

"To make some tea," said Linda.

"No. You never make tea this time of night. Get back in bed."

Linda got back in bed, wearing her slippers.

"I won't lose another night's sleep over this. Now be quiet," said Maury.

Linda rolled herself into a ball, but felt the fat of her stomach push over the band of her underwear. She straightened her legs so that the feeling went away. She still wore maternity pants to the grocery store. Maury rubbed his feet together as he did every night as he bargained with sleep. He wore but a size seven. It was difficult to find men's shoes that small. He resented the shoe store and bought most of his shoes from catalogs. If they were too big, he tucked tissue paper in the ends rather than send them back. The telephone didn't ring again until four, but they were both awake to hear it.

