

Lips of an Angel

by Tyler Koch

"Hey honey. How are you?" The man sat down in the office chair, his cell phone pressed against his ear. Light peeked beneath the closed door from the main area of the house.

"I'm good," replied the woman on the other end, her voice gentle and quiet.

The man smiled. "I'm glad to hear that. How are the kids?"

"Great." Her happiness was evident. "Frank did really well in his piano recital. Becky wasn't thrilled with the idea of running around a soccer field for an hour, but I think next week will be better."

"Yea well she just needs a few weeks. It was the same thing with softball, remember?"

"Of course, of course."

"I would have liked to see Frank. Did he end up nailing that difficult part about two-thirds of the way through? I know he was struggling with that for a while."

"He did! I was so happy. You should have seen the look on his face after he finished. I've never been so proud."

The man moved the phone to his opposite ear. "That's great."

"I know. He's been talking about it non-stop. He goes to the piano three times a day and plays those notes just to prove he knew what he was doing. I love it."

"I would like to hear that," said the man, laughing. He hummed into the phone.

"You know your singing is terrible, right?"

"Really?"

The woman laughed. "It's alright. I don't mind. But I won't listen to you sing Adele. That's just too much. Her voice was not meant to be copied, let alone by you."

The man chuckled. "Alright, I hear you. I'll stick to my favorites: AC/DC, Def Leopard—"

"Not while I'm around you're not." He heard her smile through the phone.

The man readjusted in the office chair and looked to the closed door. The light beneath remained unbroken.

"How's your job?"

"Same as ever." The woman took a deep breath.

"Nothing's going to change. It pays the bills."

The man nodded. "How is that going?"

"Fine," she said.

"That bad?"

"Worse. I don't know what to do. It's hard without you here."

"I know." He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. "I know."

"Do you know how long—"

"Soon. I can't say for sure, but it's soon. I promise. I love you."

"I love you too," said the woman in a voice almost too small to hear. "It'd be nice to have you around for more than a few days at a time."

"I know," he replied softly.

The light beneath the door shifted and the man fell silent, holding a hand over the speaker. After several heartbeats, the light returned to normal.

"You there?" he heard the woman say.

"Yea, sorry."

"Everything alright?"

"Yea. Everything's good. Sorry."

"Ok." She sounded hesitant. "Should I go?"

"No. You're fine. I'm sorry."

"You sure?"

"Yes."

For the space of a moment, neither spoke.

"Maybe—"

"Stop. It's ok." He paused. "You see they shut down the old theater downtown?"

"It's a shame. I signed that petition that Betty Albright started but I guess it didn't matter."

"They're making room for apartments. I saw the plan yesterday online."

"And destroying history one tenant at a time."

The man nodded. "I think the Wizard of Oz was my favorite. Especially with that young cast. Dorothy was phenomenal."

The woman shouted to her children on the other end of the line as the man muted the phone with his hand.

"Sorry," she said. "Frank was making a fort this morning and decided to destroy the thing with Becky inside."

"You need to go?"

"No. Not at all. We don't talk enough as it is."

The man said nothing, his foot tapping the ground anxiously.

"Sorry," she said.

"It's not your fault. I'm the one who's sorry."

"Me too." After a beat she continued. "But I loved the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy was great. So was the lion. I haven't laughed that hard since."

"Me neither. I didn't—"

The light beneath the door faded completely. The handle began to turn.

"I have to run," said the man deathly quiet.

"Call me later." The voice was desperate. "Please."

Without answering, the man hung up the phone and looked to the completed business proposal he'd set on his desk before making the call.

"Everything alright?" said a woman through the open door. "Were you talking to yourself?" In her arms she held a pile of folded laundry.

The man turned his head and smiled, holding a pen in one hand and the marked proposal in the other. The phone lay between his legs, unseen.

"I was. Sorry. I'm trying to double check and make sure we have all our bases covered."

"Is that the same proposal you worked on last week? I thought you finished with that?"

"I did. Sally wasn't happy though, and when Sally ain't happy—"

"—ain't nobody happy," finished his wife. She smiled. "Ok. Just checking on you. Dinner is ready when you are. I just put the kids to bed."

"Great. I'll be there in a minute."

"Ok."

"I love you," he said to her.

She raised an eyebrow. "Oh do you?" She laughed. "I love you too, honey."

His wife continued down the hallway to their bedroom. The man clicked the pen and laid it on the desk, exhaling deeply. He double checked his phone and saw a text. Reading it quickly, he responded and deleted the message. Then he stood and exited his office, greeted by the smell of sweet potatoes and salmon waiting for him in the kitchen.

