

And You--And You--And You

by Con Chapman

They had been stuck in traffic since they'd dropped off Janet, her friend from New York, and her boyfriend Greg at Logan. In retrospect, it was a dumb idea to invite them for Fourth of July weekend. It was hot, her apartment wasn't that big, there was a million people in town, and the spur of the moment idea to go to Plum Island and then circle back to the airport and drop them off had turned into a disaster. The roads were jammed with people coming into Boston for the concert and the fireworks, and they had inched their way along as Janet grew more and more nervous, almost hysterical, that they were going to miss their plane.

"Aren't you allowed to drive in the breakdown lane?" she had asked as she hung on the back of the headrest on Linda's seat.

"It doesn't make any difference," he had said without looking back. "The lane ends up ahead, and people won't let you in without a fight. This is the Italian section."

"I'm Italian," Janet said with a tone of irritation that was subdued in accord with the formalities that obtain between hosts and weekend guests, but not excessively so.

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“I know—I'm just saying,” he said, trying to exculpate himself from blame for the unintentional insult.

“Just saying what?” Janet asked.



“This is an area where you can get your tires slashed for taking up a parking spot if you're not from the neighborhood. People don't take slights—major or minor—lightly.”

Janet sat back in her seat and Greg patted her knee. “Calm down,” he said. “We've got plenty of time. We're not checking bags.”

Every now and then there'd be a break as a traffic light changed in their favor, and he'd make as much progress as he could before things would jam up again.

“What terminal are we in?” Janet asked.

“Delta is B,” Greg said, and that seemed to make her feel they'd made it—just A and B and they'd be there.

They turned into the entrance to the airport as they came out of the tunnel, drove past the rental car exit. Terminal A was closed so there was no traffic backed up there, and after waiting a few minutes at the entry to Terminal B they were at curbside.



“Thank you guys *so* much for such a great weekend,” Janet said to Linda as she gave her a hug.

“Good to see you, old man,” Greg said. He was like that, an investment banker, a latter-day Tom Buchanan without the polo ponies, self-consciously fusty, but fun nonetheless. He'd ordered a hundred dollar bottle of wine at dinner the night before, but he had also recounted—with photographic accuracy—some Pee-wee Herman routines from before the bust in the porn theatre.

“Sorry I was a little crabby back there,” Janet said as she hugged him softly. “I should have trusted your driving.”

“Actually, you shouldn't,” Linda said. “His sense of direction is slightly defective.”

“Take care of my old roomie, okay?” Janet had said, and then kissed him.

“Don't worry, I will,” he had said. “She's got me on a short leash.”

They got back in the car as others were bearing down on them, and waved as they drove off.

“Bye,” Linda had yelled out the window, then he changed lanes to get to the exit and they were back in line again, waiting to get in the tunnel.

He wasn't sure what to make of the weekend, whether he was being auditioned for groom or what. It had been more than a little uncomfortable, having to split the bill with a guy who probably made five times what he did.

“Did you like them?” Linda asked.

“Sure, they're a lot of fun.”

“Greg's kind of full of himself, but he's better than her old boyfriend.”

“Why's that?”

“He was like you—too quiet. Janet needs somebody . . . outgoing.”

“You're right—that's not me.”

She didn't know how to take that—whether he'd had a bad time and was now going to go into hibernation at his place until the next weekend, the way he did whenever they'd had a spat, or it hadn't been a good weekend for her to have sex.

They drove on in silence for awhile and she realized that, whatever they were going to do, she needed to go back to his place to get her briefcase for work Monday. As much as she would have liked to have him drop her off in Chestnut Hill, she had to get her things.

“I . . . uh . . . hate to mention it, but I have to go back to your place,” she said gingerly.

“You don't want me to drop you off at your place?”

“I left my stuff at your place Friday night, and I need it first thing Monday morning for a meeting.”

He let go with a sigh; he'd have to drive through the Fourth of July crowd—hundreds of thousands of people—all because she hadn't planned ahead.

“No problem,” he said as he turned and headed down Storrow Drive, the Charles River on their right.

The Esplanade was already filling up even though it was barely mid-afternoon. The bridges were filled with people carrying coolers and blanks, and cops were stationed on the river side to check for liquor.

“I'm sorry,” she said, and she turned to look at him.

“It's okay,” he said. “I just have to get off at the bridge, and then go into Cambridge, make a U-turn and come back.”

He said it, she thought, with a tone that suggested he was taking her on the Oregon Trail.

“You don't have to be that way about it,” she said.



"I'm not being any way," he said as he looked back to his right, into his blind spot. He changed lanes.

"Yes you were," she said. "They were my friends, and this whole weekend has been an imposition on you."

"I said it was okay," he said, but even though his words were intended as mollification, he sounded angry.

"Janet and I are good friends," she said. "We promised each other we'd be in each other's weddings, and not make the other buy a stupid-looking bridesmaid's dress."

She realized as soon as she'd said it that was the wrong thing to bring up, where things stood with them.

"Um-hmm," he said as he exited onto the Mass Ave bridge. He held the car at the yellow line while hordes of people walked by on their way into Boston.

She tried to think of something to say to take the edge off the conversation, but he wasn't in a mood to talk, she hoped just because of the traffic and the people.

"This is going to take forever," she said when she saw the line of cars headed into Boston on the bridge. "I'm sorry."

"These things happen," he said. "Do you have your key?"

"Yes—why?"

"I'll park on Marlborough, and you can go up and get your stuff and I'll take you to your place. By the time I get back it'll be the middle of the concert and the traffic will be lighter."

So that's how it's going to be, she thought. He's had enough of me for one weekend. Fine—probably better that they have some time apart.

The cars were stopped on the bridge, but somebody waved them into the flow and so they only had the width of the river to go. She felt stiff and hot, and he seemed to have switched his mind off the weekend on to work already.

They stopped and started in silence, he looking down towards the Hatch Shell at the big boats that had moved into position for the fireworks. Ordinarily he'd have said something, she thought, joked around. The silence was painful.



They proceeded by intervals of four or five cars, which was how many could make it through the stop light before traffic jammed up on Comm Ave; the cross streets were gridlocked, with everybody trying to get into town for the big celebration, while she was just trying to get her things and get back out, back to her apartment to take a shower.

They made it across the water, one block to go, when they heard a siren up ahead and watched two fire trucks go past on Comm Ave, probably on their way to put out a hibachi fire on somebody's deck. The commotion meant that they missed a green light, and the congestion was worse than it had been all day.

"Might as well turn off the engine," he said as he reached for the key.

"Don't—I want air conditioning," she said, and he looked at her with a barely-concealed scowl, as if she were eating up provisions that had to last them for a long time.

"Fine," he said, and put his right hand back on the steering wheel. "You could just open up your window," he said as he caused the driver side window to roll down. The breeze from the river was faint, but it gave the car a sense of space—the smell of the water.

"What's the point of having air conditioning on if you're going to open up your window?" she said irritably.

“Okay,” he said, as he pushed the button to raise it again.

They sat there for several minutes, which seemed longer than they were. The cars in front of them weren't moving; perhaps the fire was just a few blocks down from the intersection.

“I'm sorry, I have to turn the car off if I'm going to get you back to your place, I'm almost out of gas and it's Sunday,” he said after a while.

“All right, she said. She pushed the button on her side as he did on his, and he turned off the car. They were silent and sweating, but at least the wind off the river cooled them down.



As they sat there, a bearded, disheveled man made his way up the line of cars from Marlborough Street, walking between lanes, talking and gesturing to the cars on either side of him.

"What's he doing?" she asked.

"I dunno. He looks like one of those guys who hawk newspapers at stop signs."

"Except he doesn't have any papers."

They could see people in cars causing their window to go up as the man made his way towards them. "Turn on the car so I can roll my window up," she said. "He scares me."

He turned the key in the ignition but the man was almost at the hood of their car, so they hadn't time to close their windows and heard him speak with a firm voice and a lusterless, almost business-like tone.

"Fuck you," they heard him say to the driver two cars ahead of them, "And you," to the next driver, "and you" to them as they sat there, his wild eyes glaring at them through the window, "And you" to the car behind them, "And you, and you, and you," off into the distance, making his way across the river, cursing as he went.

Traffic started to move, catching them unawares. They rolled slowly forwards, happy to be making progress, relieved to have the man in the rear view mirror.

He turned onto Marlborough Street and, halfway up the block, stopped the car. They turned and looked at each other and, like a balloon popping, started laughing all of a sudden, for no reason and with no explanation other than relief now that the long day was behind them.

"I'll go get my stuff," she said after a while with a conciliatory tone, her eyes tearing up from the release of the laughter.

"I'll park the car and come up with you."

