

# Absence

by Diane D. Gillette

Her mouth was sour; her forehead was still damp with perspiration. She leaned against the bathroom wall and noted her complexion had gone pale. She wanted to slide down the wall and rest until she felt steadier, but she opened the door and slipped out of the ladies room. She needed to be back at his side. She didn't trust his promises. He had a history that spoke louder than his words. Nonetheless, his words brought her a thin veil of comfort.

His hands were not nervously tapping on the tile tabletop, as they had been when she turned her back on him. His long, lean legs no longer stretched out into the aisle, an inconvenience to anyone who may try to pass. His sunglasses no longer covered his eyes against the early morning sun that was streaming through the coffee shop windows. His words, already meaningless, no longer hung in the air around them, beacons of false hope. Indeed, there was nothing of him at all left sitting in that chair where she had last seen him. Hope vainly fluttered inside her. Perhaps he was getting another cup of coffee. Perhaps he stepped out to make a phone call. Maybe he was getting her a mug of peppermint tea to sooth her stomach in an unprecedented moment of selflessness. But she knew better. She never should have met him at a café called Ennuï. It had no choice but to be a breeding ground for melancholy and disappointment. But yet, it was the first place that came to her mind when he finally agreed to meet her to talk. Face-to-face. Heart-to-heart. They had a future together now whether he liked it or not.

While his chair was empty, the newspaper still lay open to the classified section across the table. Blood red lines encircled potential jobs, cheap apartments, and one ad for gently used baby furniture. She sat on his chair and buried her face in her hands. He'd made his decision, obviously.

She felt the absences of what he took with him more keenly than the presence of what he left behind. His jacket was no longer slung across the back of his chair. His paper coffee cup no

longer held down one corner of the newspaper. The shiny picture he'd painted of their life together had vanished in the moment her body had purged itself of her breakfast. There was no indication as to who had been pouring over the newspaper. There was no evidence that anyone had ever sat at that table, held her hand and spoon-fed her one syrupy sweet line after another. And there was no proof that she'd gobbled them up — greedy, greedy, greedy — a baby bird, helpless to do anything but consume her weight in regurgitated lies until she either learned to fly on her own or ruptured from it all.

