

Assiduity Twenty Six

by J. Mykell Collinz

Uzma and Luv are asleep in the front room when I arrive home. Fearing they would be gone now seems laughable.

"You're back," Uzma whispers, rising from the sofa.

She leans her body against me and turns her face upward to meet my lips. As I bend down to complete the kiss, she wraps her arms around my neck and I'm rejuvenated by her sensuality.

I have everything I want, right here, right now, I conclude, feeling a twinge of guilt for my continued good fortune.

She places Luv in bed and then joins me in the kitchen dressed in dark blue pants and crew neck sweater. Her walnut blond hair is tied in a ponytail with a yellow ribbon. She sits at the serving counter facing me at the gas griddle and, in the bright kitchen lights, I admire her smooth, fair complected, pinkish skin, her facial symmetry with eyes set wide, full lips, high cheekbones, and tapered chin. She's perfectly average, the essence of photogenic beauty.

"I thought you quit eating this stuff," she says.

I'm cooking sausage, bacon, fried eggs, and hash browns. With a pot of coffee brewing, I'm gearing up for a long night.

"In this cold weather I crave it," I reply: "And there's a country market by the airport with the best local meat and eggs. They even bake their own breads, pastries, and cookies."

"You bought enough food to feed an army for a month," she says.

"With space in one of the freezers, I decided to stock up," I reply.

"Tell me about your trip," she says.

"Roll us a joint of Rasheed's medical grade," I say: "I love eating while I'm high. I haven't done that in a while."

"There's a joint ready to go in the tray on the table," she replies: "I rolled it earlier this afternoon when Luv was napping. I got stoned just trying to light it. That stuff is strong, you don't need much. Plus, I felt paranoid without you here. I found myself worrying you might never come back. I was so glad to see you standing there when I opened my eyes."

I look up from the griddle to see her greenish blue eyes, now moist and glistening in the bright lights.

"We're a fine couple of worry warts," I say: "I was afraid you'd be gone when I got back."

"I'm afraid I'm dreaming," she says: "You make me feel like a different woman. Before I met you, I dutifully accepted my place in the cooperative community, unable to imagine a plausible alternative, never really trying. I wasn't aware of being unhappy. Now, living here with you, visualizing our future together, without worrying about other people's problems, I've been able to relax, maybe for the first time in my life. And while you were gone today, my anxiety level approached overwhelming."

"Food's ready," I say: "Light that joint."

"I'll set your table," she says: "You light the joint."

With an instant rush of euphoria, I sit at the table feeling centered, balanced, capable of accomplishing anything to which I set my mind. Then a long list of unfinished projects rises to the surface of my consciousness. My screenplay waiting to be filmed needs an actress for the lead part and I'm still hoping Uzma will accept the challenge. Yet bridging the subject now would risk spoiling the moment. Instead, I visualize camera angles and distances, capturing her beauty in form and motion as she moves gracefully about the kitchen collecting my plate, cup, and silverware. She gives me another close up of her face when she's done, bending down to kiss me.

"When are you going to tell me about your trip?" she says.

"The prison wasn't much to see," I reply: "Low, flat, gray buildings, gray skies. The good news is Bobbie Jack. He seems like a rational person. I felt a rapport with him, enough to believe he's not coming here claiming ownership after he gets out.

"Can you show me the basement now?"

"I have some people coming tomorrow. They'll open it up, turn on the heating and air condition units, make it suitable for exploration. We can't just go down there and open doors."

"Did the guy in prison tell you anything about how he planned to use the basement?"

"The visit was too short for that. But you'll see when we go down there, it's clear they were attempting to build a command and control center with a hardened bunker beneath it. They're preparing for local wars to break out in the future between citizen militias and privatized corporate security forces representing pseudo government authority."

"I can't watch you eating that," she says as I stuff my mouth with eggs and sausage: "I'll be in the front room."

She must have read my mind.

