

Chuck and Judy

By Nate Gach

They had only been married for five years when he caught her cheating on him for the second time.

The first time he had come home early from the factory. She was always complaining that he wasn't home enough. That he spent too much time at work and too much time at the bar afterwards. She just wanted her husband back, she said. Wanted him to come home and pick her up in his arms like he did when they first were married, kiss her and make love to her like she was the only woman he'd ever love.

He'd just smiled his big, goofy smile at her and said, "Judy, we never made love. I can come home and fuck you, but I'm a simple guy. I know how to fuck and I know how to fuck hard. If you're looking for lovemaking, you should have thought about that before you married me."

She didn't take that well.

He had watched the tears well up in her eyes when she ran into the bedroom and locked the door. He banged on the door with his big fists and called out her name and how sorry he was.

"I don't mean that I don't love you. I just mean. It's just that." Words didn't come too easily to Chuck. His explanations often made things worse. He considered popping the hinges off the door, but that wouldn't do any good. Judy didn't want to talk and she was stubborn as hell when she got her mind set.

His father-in-law had told him so the day he asked for his blessing to marry her—"She's a beautiful girl, but she's stubborn as a mule, Chuck. Just like her mother, that girl is. You sure you want to marry a mule?"

Chuck had assured Mr. Watson that he was positive he wanted to marry Judy, and Mr. Watson had wished him all the luck in the world and shook his hand.

"You're in for a hell of a ride, boy. I just hope you really know what you're getting yourself in for."

The first six months had been great. Most of the time they just fucked. The only time Chuck ever watched television was on Saturdays and Sundays, to see the Michigan State games. He had gone to Michigan State to study agriculture. Judy was a local girl who loved football. They met in the stadium during a game. Judy asked Chuck why a big guy like him wasn't out on

the field. He told her about the combine accident he'd suffered as a kid. He and his cousins had been screwing around with the combine on his uncle's farm and Chuck had been stupid enough to try to touch one of the blades while two of his cousins were sitting in the cab. They were fighting over who got to sit in the driver's seat and somebody knocked something when they were wrestling and started the combine. Chuck tried to pull his hand back in time, but it was too late, and the combine had ripped off half of his hand before he was able to pull away.

Michigan was cold by the time football season rolled around and Chuck liked it that way. He could wear gloves just as soon as the first frost hit. That was why Judy hadn't seen his deformity to begin with. It bothered most girls. Chuck was a good looking guy, but he would catch his dates staring at his mangled hand when they went out for the first time. Usually he wouldn't bother calling for a second date.

But Judy was different. She did not cringe when Chuck took her out to a local bar for a drink without his gloves on. After the bar Chuck decided that he wanted to share something special with her, so they hopped into his truck and drove the forty minutes south to where he grew up. He parked outside of the local diner and together they walked through town and down to the lake that stood close to Chuck's home. As they looked at the peacefulness of the semi-frozen lake, he felt Judy reach for his hand. She was the first girl to hold his hand since the accident. He stood there in disbelief as he felt her fingers tangle with the flesh, plastic and leather of his reconstructed hand. Standing under the bridge, they kissed while watching their breath steam between them. Chuck fell in love with her right then, and he hadn't stopped loving her since.

That was why what happened the night he came home early from the factory came as such a shock to him. He worked the long hours to please Judy. Things had been different in the beginning. He tilled the land of what had been his grandfather's farm. He was home most of the time and he could go into the house at midday. Judy would make him lunch and kiss him on the neck and unbutton his shirt while he halfheartedly protested, saying that he stank of sweat and dirt. To which she would just say, "I love the way you stink." And he'd carry her to the bedroom and slip off her flower patterned sundress and they'd fuck like two teenagers, their hands hungry to grasp each other's flesh, their mouths tasting of the berries Chuck grew in the garden. When they finished and he collapsed on top of her and feel her small fingers tracing the lines of the muscles of his back. He kissed her and went back to the fields until dark. She cooked for him while he showered and they would take a walk down to the lake after dinner. They would come back to the house to make love again, or not, but either way they still fell asleep naked in each other's arms.

But all that changed when the farm went bust and Chuck had to take the job at the factory. He didn't want Judy to have to work, and in the back of his mind he was pretty sure that she would protest if he asked her to get a job.

Chuck didn't mind the factory job so much. He missed being in the fields and working the land and he missed his midday lunch breaks, but he wanted Judy to be happy and have a nice home and if that meant working long hours stuck inside four concrete walls, so be it. But then Judy started to want more and more things. She said she was bored at home and why didn't they

get one of these and why couldn't she have one of these and so Chuck started working overtime to buy Judy the things that she said she wanted.

And then she had started complaining how he was never at home and they fought more often than they fucked and then the big fight happened and Chuck decided that he would try to make things right between them again. He ran by Dale's Flower Shop and bought a dozen roses and a bottle of red wine and took off from work at five. When he walked into the house he didn't see Judy in the kitchen or the living room, so he headed upstairs to the bedroom. He opened the door just in time to see Phil, his neighbor down the road, zipping up his blue jeans, and Judy pulling her panties up under her sundress.

The bottle made a nasty crashing sound as it hit the floorboards. The red wine stain had come out of the carpet but you could still see where it had soaked into the wood. Phil didn't press charges, but he made sure to cross to the other side whenever he and Chuck passed along the road.

Judy screamed at Chuck that it wasn't Phil's fault. Phil ran out of the house bleeding from the nose, tears streaming down his face. Chuck wanted to know who the fuck's fault it was. Judy said it was his own damn fault. She said that he ignored her, he didn't love her anymore, he didn't pay attention to her.

Chuck half believed her.

Even so, he couldn't bring himself to sleep with Judy for some months after it happened. He and Judy hardly ever talked, and he wore pajamas to bed from then on out. Any time he saw Judy naked he just thought of Phil's hands all over her, Phil's mouth kissing her breasts, Phil's dick fucking his wife. Chuck couldn't even get hard around Judy anymore.

But then, one night he and some guys from the factory went out to the bar and had a few. Chuck had a few too many and when Harry dropped him off at the house he saw Judy sitting in the living room watching a DVD on their big screen TV and he picked her up and threw her over his shoulder like he used to when they would flirt and play and he carried her upstairs to the bedroom and they fucked hard for a long time. Chuck held and kissed his wife with a desperation he had never known before. He made her promise that he would be the only man that would ever fuck her again for the rest of her life. She gasped that he would be, that she was sorry, that it would never happen again, that Phil meant nothing to her, that she was just so lonely and as Chuck came he saw the tears welling in his wife's eyes and he collapsed upon her just as he always had before when things between them had been so good. For the first time in a year, he and Judy slept nude and holding each other.

The next day he tore up the stained floorboards and put down new ones.

Things were good again for some time. Judy's mood seemed to lift and she smiled more and watched much less television. She even offered to get a job in town working at the diner and waiting tables. But Chuck wouldn't hear of it. He told her he didn't want drunken idiots slobbering all over his wife. They were doing well enough as it was and as long as Judy kept her

frivolous spending to a minimum Chuck wouldn't have to work long overtime hours and they would be just fine.

But Judy was bored, alone in the house, and she persisted that she wanted a job. She needed to get out of the house more often, and do something with herself. So Chuck relented and Judy picked up a shift at the diner. She worked the day shift and usually got home just before Chuck did. Dinner was never on the table anymore because Judy said she was too tired to cook. If she had to look at one more plate of food she might very well scream. She and Chuck would sit at the small formica table in their kitchen and talk about their days while eating out of plastic TV dinner containers. For the most part Judy would just bitch about how horrible all the customers were and what assholes all the cooks were. They complained that Judy was too slow getting the food to the tables and that it was always cold. But Mark, her manager, said all the cooks were lazy immigrants with a chip on their shoulders. Judy said Mark was funny and made her laugh and he was probably the best part of her day.

Chuck didn't like the sound of that very much, and so he decided that the next time Judy was at work he would go in and have lunch. He waited until a Saturday when he had off from work and went in. A heavysset girl in an apron too small for her greeted him at the front counter.

"Good afternoon, sir. Smoking or non?"

"I'd like to sit in Judy's section if it's not a problem."

"Sure thing."

Chuck followed the girl, wondering a little as to how long the straps of her apron could hold out before they snapped under the strain. She set the menu down at a table in the back of the restaurant near the door to the kitchen.

"Judy will be right with you, sir. Who should I tell her has asked to be sat in her section?"

"Tell her it's her husband."

"Sure thing," said the heavysset waitress. Chuck was almost sure a slightly worried look crossed her face, for just a moment, like a passing shadow. She made her way through the swinging door which led to the kitchen. Before it swung shut Chuck caught a glimpse of Judy and a tall man standing behind her. It swung shut and then opened once again, just long enough for Chuck to see the tall man give Judy a quick slap on the ass. When the door opened for the third time he saw that the man was gone and the heavysset waitress was pointing towards him. A few seconds later his wife emerged from the kitchen looking a bit flushed and wearing a forced smile on her face.

"Hi, honey. You should have told me that you were coming today. I'd have had Peggy put you at a better table."

“This one’s just fine. I’ve got a great view of the kitchen. You look kinda hot. You feeling all right?”

“Yeah, just gets hot back there near all of the stoves and grills. What can I get for you?”

“I was hoping maybe you could tell me what was good.”

“Well, you could get...”

“I’ll tell you what. Why don’t you surprise me?”

“You want a cup of coffee?”

“Sure. And I’d like to meet your boss if he’s around.”

“Oh, honey, Mark’s busy with inventory and stuff. I don’t want to bother him.”

“I understand. I’ll just take that coffee when you have the chance.”

Judy walked over to the waitress station while Chuck fumed silently in his seat. He absentmindedly tapped the surface of the table with his prosthetic hand and waited for Judy to return. But before she could get back with her coffee, the tall man from the kitchen came out of the swinging door and walked past Chuck. He was tall and lean, with close cropped blonde hair and a moustache.

“Mark?”

“Yes?”

“Hi. You’re Judy’s boss. I just wanted to meet you. She talks about you so much I figured that I might as well meet this funny man.”

Mark looked at Chuck’s hand. “Ah, you must be Chuck.”

“Yeah. That’s me,” Chuck said lamely.

“That wife of yours is a real looker. You better hold on to her or somebody’s liable to snatch her up.”

Judy emerged from the waitresses’ station carrying his coffee and some creamers.

“Speak of the devil,” Mark said eyeing Judy from head to toe.

“Chuck, I see you’ve met Mark,” Judy said as she set his coffee down at the table.

“So I have.”

“Remember what I said, Chuck. Words to live by. Words to live by.” Mark walked toward the front counter and began a conversation with the heavysset waitress who had sat Chuck. He looked angry about something.

“So, what did you two talk about?” Judy said in a casual way.

“Not much. Mostly about you. Just wanted to meet him.”

“And now you have.”

“And now I have.”

Chuck and Judy said very little for the rest of Chuck’s lunch. She stopped by occasionally to check that he had enough coffee, but for the most part she tended to her other tables. She eventually brought him a turkey club sandwich and a bowl of chicken soup. Chuck watched the woman that he loved as she went from table to table, flashing her smile at the single men in the hopes of making an extra buck here or there. Chuck finished his lunch and left a tip for her on the table along with a note. “I love you, we’re out of milk. Here’s ten for milk and cigarettes if you need them. I love you. –C” He left while Judy was still in the kitchen picking up food. He paid his bill at the front counter and left without bothering to return Mark’s farewell.

That night Judy came home without the milk. Chuck told her to quit her job and stay at home. Maybe it was time that they thought about starting a family.

“Fuck you, Chuck.”

“I thought you wanted kids.”

“You wanted kids, Chuck. Besides, how the hell are we supposed to feed a bunch of rugrats when you can hardly put food on the table for us?”

“I’ll pick up some overtime. Just a bit here and there. We’ll be fine.”

“The hell we will. You aren’t leaving me in this place by myself again.”

“I was just trying to suggest a solution. You don’t seem to like your job. I thought you wanted a family. It just made sense.”

“The hell it did. Forget it.”

Judy came home from the diner in a foul mood. She would cuss and snap and bitch about every little thing that Chuck did. So he started picking up more hours. No sense hanging around the house if Judy didn’t want him there.

The funny thing was, Judy started doing the same thing. She would pick up the late shift and come home well after midnight some nights. They rarely saw each other anymore. Just a nod goodbye in the morning, silence over a cup of coffee and a cursory peck on the lips.

Judy also started smoking. The smell of it seeped into her clothing and her hair and much of the house. Chuck realized that she didn't smell like his wife anymore.

Chuck missed his wife. He missed the way things were when they were first married and the farm was good and the lovemaking happened without tears or anger. But they drifted once again and soon even breakfast in the morning stopped. Their only communication was through notes stuck to the refrigerator. Most of them just said "working late" or "be back around 10". Neither of them bothered to put hearts next to their names. Chuck wondered whether Judy even noticed that they hadn't said "I love you" in over six months. Chuck didn't bother to put on enough coffee for four cups because he knew he wouldn't be able to drink it all by himself. He just stuck his note to the refrigerator and went on his way.

One Thursday in November, there was a gas leak at the factory and all the men were sent home early. Chuck thought he might go visit Judy at work and grab a quick bite to eat at the same time. The heater in the truck took a while to warm up and Chuck pulled his gloves on. The diner was only a few miles from the house, in the opposite direction of the factory and Chuck got there just as the heater in the truck began to kick out warm blasts of air. A light snow began to fall as Chuck got out of his truck and he brushed it off his shoulders and shook out his hair when he went into the diner. He walked up to the girl in the apron with the mousey brown hair at the register and asked to be seated in Judy's section.

"Judy isn't working today. She asked for the day off."

On a whim, against his better judgment, he asked a second question.

"Is Mark in today?"

"No, Mark's got the day off. His wife is sick or something."

That goddamned lying bitch.

"Oh, okay. Can I just have a seat by the window?"

"Gets a bit cold, sir. What, with the draft and all."

"I'll manage."

Chuck followed the girl to the booth and watched her sashay her boney little bottom all along the way. He thought he could have her if he wanted to. She'd never seen his hand. He could just ask her what time she got off of work and then pick her up and get a cheap hotel room somewhere nearby and he could fuck her with all the hatred he felt for his wife. He could take out all his aggressions on this—what was she? No more than seventeen or eighteen—girl and go

on about his life. She'd get laid like she probably had never been before and he could release all his anger and frustration.

"Do you need a menu?" Chuck looked at the name on her pin. Mary-Lou.

"Yes, please, Mary-Lou," Chuck said as he took his seat in the booth.

The girl smiled at him as she handed him the menu. She had a cute smile. He couldn't do anything to her. She'd done him no harm. And besides, she was somebody's daughter, somebody's sister, there could be some guy out there that was madly in love with her the way he used to be in love with Judy.

"You all right, sir?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. The cold's just stinging my eyes." He hadn't realized she was still standing there.

"I was just asking if you'd like some coffee to warm you up."

"Do you have hot cocoa?"

"We sure do."

"I'll take one of those, please. Plenty of marshmallows too if you've got them."

"Coming right up. Oh, and if you need help picking out what to eat, may I recommend one of our homemade chicken pot pies. They're delicious."

"That sounds great."

She smiled as she walked away.

He could kill Mark. He could buy a gun and shoot the son-of-a-bitch dead. Lots of people had guns for hunting or for protecting their home in this part of Michigan. Chuck had a clean record. The worst run in he ever had with the cops was over a parking ticket Judy had failed to tell him about.

"What was that?"

"Enough marshmallows for you?"

"Plenty. Thanks."

She smiled again as she walked away. Killing Mark would give him no peace. Mark was not the one to break his heart, to make him a cuckold and a laughingstock. Judy was the one at fault here. Chuck would find no resolution in murdering Mark. And he couldn't possibly kill

his wife. Chuck watched the snow fall silently on the trucks and cars parked out in the lot. The snow obliterated all of the noise and chaos that stood outside the quiet warmth of the diner. The snow was falling harder now. Chuck thought of his first kiss with Judy under the bridge. How she had looked up at him with those big brown eyes full of love and affection.

“Careful, sir. They’re awful hot. It’s best to stick a fork in them and wait till they’ve cooled off.”

“Thank you, Mary-Lou.”

Chuck did just as Mary-Lou had told him and watched the steam rising out of the pie. He waited patiently for his lunch to cool. As he took the first bite he decided that he would kill them both. Judy and Mark. And most likely, himself too.

After finishing his lunch Chuck took out just enough from his wallet to pay the bill and dumped the remainder of the contents out on the table. When he totaled it he found that he’d left forty-five dollar and ninety-eight cents on the table. He dropped the bill along with his payment on the counter in front of Mary-Lou and walked out the door.

She called after him, “Your change, sir!”

He ignored Mary-Lou’s call and made his way toward the truck. Twice he lost his balance and almost fell on the pavement of the parking lot. He took his sleeve and cleared the snow from the windshield and got into the truck. The engine hesitated to start in the cold, but on the third try he heard it come to life and he pulled out of the lot with his tires squealing. He drove fast, too fast for the weather, struggling to keep the truck on the road. He turned the heater on to prevent the windshield from fogging up with his breath, but as always, the cab was slow to heat up. He knew what he’d do. He’d run to the shed, grab the gun and go quietly into the house. He’d find them there, Mark on top of his wife. She’d probably be screaming too loud to even hear him come in. Before they could get out of each other’s arms he’d shoot them both and then himself, so that when the police came they’d know why he’d done it. No need for a note. Chuck was bad enough explaining himself in spoken word, let alone trying to get things down on paper.

Chuck sped up. There were hardly any cars on the road as the weather was so bad. He banged his good fist into the heater to try to jolt it into life. The fog on the windshield finally started to clear and he sped up as he headed onto the bridge which stood over the frozen lake. Out of nowhere he saw two young boys with sleds sitting at the top of the bridge. Chuck tried to brake but he was going too fast and in the snow his tires were getting very little traction. He swerved to avoid hitting the boys and the truck went clear through the guardrail, sailing through the air and into the frozen lake. Chuck was under the icy water in a hazy cloud. Water quickly flooded the cab of the truck and Chuck thought for a moment to struggle to open the door and swim to the surface of the lake. But this would have required effort, and Chuck was just too tired to try.