

Martha sat at her desk, gazing at the posters hanging in her office, marveling at the sameness of it all. The solar system still hung there, an old version that included Pluto, and another that wished the force would be with her. A breeze generated by the air conditioning caused her paper Firefly model to swing gently and her to put on a sweater.

Everything looked the same. The people all looked the same. Jenny was wearing one of the horrendous frumpy sweaters she was fond of, Peter was making inappropriate jokes a bit too loudly at the copier, her boss was walking the floor causing people to pretend to work as he passed them.

She was the only one who knew anything was different. She found the sameness to be miraculous. There was not even the smallest detail to arouse suspicion.

Martha smiled to herself. Only she knew what she had done. Only she would ever know what she had done.

She hadn't doubted she would be able to do it. Despite the million little things that could have gone wrong, she knew that she would be able to pull it off. But knowing you can do something and actually pulling it off were two different things. She was quite proud of herself.

Jackson and his obnoxious leer leaned against her desk as he said, "You look tired. What were you up to last night?"

"Wouldn't you like to know? What do you want?"

"Latest status report, of course," he said, smiling.

They had this exchange all the time. She was always tired and he was always an asshole, but she saw no reason to be mean to him. She suspected he might even genuinely be interested, and although she didn't reciprocate his feelings there was no reason to be nasty. But today she was exhilarated by the exchange; the way nothing had changed except what she had been up to last night. Usually that was just the way she avoided revealing that she was so pathetic that she had spent most the night working on her simulated city. She was the mayor after all; her sims depended on her.

But last night she hadn't done that at all. And if only he did know what she had been up to last night. Would he recoil in disbelief? Would he avoid her? He certainly wouldn't leer at her the way he did now. She suppressed the smile of glee her secret evoked.

"Here ya go, Jacks," she said, handing him the report.

"You're a doll," he said, and walked off to go leer at someone who would enjoy it.

Maybe someday she would take him up on the promises contained in his wicked smiles, the "accidental" brush of his hand. Maybe she would reveal her secret. Which would mean he'd have to become a secret. She nearly giggled at the thought.

It was so strange to feel so brand new on the inside, to have everything feel different, but look exactly the same. She wore her same old skin and hair and teeth and clothes as the perfect disguise. The idea of it made her giddy.

Just seven days ago she had a broken and hurting inside that was heavy and painful when she moved.

"Maybe we should get married," she had suggested to him last week. Joe had looked surprised for a moment, then smiled. Her heart beat faster as she waited for the response; for him to say they should. He chuckled and stroked her cheek.

"You know I'm not the marrying type, babe," he kept smiling and had given her hand a squeeze. It felt like he had squeezed the life out of her heart.

It wasn't that she had killed him so much as let him die.

He had changed his mind too late. Well, actually it hadn't been too late. Not if she hadn't unplugged the phone. Not if she had driven him to the hospital.

He hadn't come home for two nights, so she was surprised to see him stumble out of the bathroom and fall to the floor. She just stared at him, shook her head to try to clear the vision of him laying there forcing each breath. Even after she knew she wasn't hallucinating, she just watched him crawl toward the phone on the end table. He must have taken some concoction of pain killers. She realized he was so far gone he hadn't heard her come in; didn't know she was there. It was like being on the viewing end of a one-way mirror. With no one watching she didn't have to make the appropriate reaction, she just observed.

He pulled himself up to the table edge, then stopped to rest from the effort. He grabbed the phone and she watched him dial nine as she quietly rushed to the other side of the room and pulled the plug from the wall. She had always hated how the plug had been ugly and exposed. She wanted to cover it with the end table, an antique that was too heavy for her to move by herself. But Joe thought it looked fine and wouldn't help her.

When he pressed the second "one" in the emergency call, he let himself fall. That would be enough, they would have to respond. Or they would if she hadn't pulled the plug. She leaned against the empty wall and looked on as he lay there, eyes closed, forcing each diminishing breath.

He'd stopped breathing for a few minutes before she plugged the phone back in and walked over to him. She touched him, and felt he was still warm. She wondered how long it took before he'd be cold. How long before his body became stiff?

She wanted him to just be gone. She wanted to dismiss his existence the way he had dismissed her seven days ago.

At funerals even the nastiest wretches were remembered as saints. All wrong and unkindness was absolved. But Joe would not have a funeral. He didn't deserve to be remembered sweetly. She dragged him down the hall, into the elevator, out of the elevator and into her car. She drove for a while with him laying across her back seat. She needed to find somewhere he wouldn't be found. At least not before he'd decomposed enough to be unrecognizable.

She drove until all she could see was the road illuminated by her headlights, though she knew there were grassy fields stretching on forever to either side of her. She turned off the road and into the field. She turned off her lights and just held the wheel steady. She drove for a mile, then stopped. She dragged Joe out of the backseat, got back in the car and drove back to the road. It was late when she'd gotten home and she was still exhausted when she woke up.

Martha decided to take a nap during lunch, still tired from dragging Joe around last night. She got a blanket out of her trunk and climbed into her back seat. It smelled faintly of Joe's cologne and she breathed him in as she drifted to sleep.