

Chains

By Ria Falkner

She leaned her face close to the mirror. Taking a dab of make-up, she applied it to the purple-blue area that appeared around her left eye. It hurt. A moan escaped her lips, but she quickly stifled the sound. *I have to be careful. Maybe he can hear me.*

She pulled back a few inches from the mirror, till her face came into focus. *How can I look exactly the same when I feel so different?*

Her skin was radiant. Tiny pores, no wrinkles and a small, brown beauty mark dotted her left cheek.

From a small basket, she took a pair of tweezers and plucked a few hairs from her highly arched eyebrows, then ran a brush through her full, wavy blond hair. *Yes, I look just fine. You wouldn't think... better not think.... better just leave.*

Clicking off the bathroom light and tiptoeing down the hall past the bedroom, she glanced in. He was lying on the bed. *He looks so peaceful. You'd never know he was such a bastard.*

She moved closer. His eyes were slightly opened. She gasped and pulled back, fast. *He'll kill me.*

Grabbing her purse and keys from the dresser she ran out of the room to the back door. *Be calm now. No need to panic. No need to lock the door. Just get in the car.*

Turning down the old road she headed for town. After several miles the sign reading, "Joe and Mary's Diner" appeared. She pulled in. She could see Mary inside, busy at the counter.

Looking in the rear view mirror, she fluffed her hair and adjusted her dangling, silver earrings. *No one will believe I stopped for breakfast.*

A bell rang as she opened the door. Two middle-aged men sat in a booth drinking coffee. Both men looked up as she walked toward a small table in the corner.

"Why, Mrs. Baker. What a surprise. We haven't seen you in here for years. You're up mighty early this morning," Mary said.

"Yes, I'm actually going on a little trip."

"No Mr. Baker?"

"No," she said. "He couldn't get away."

Mary walked over to the table, pad, pencil, and coffee pot in hand.

"Well, what will you have this morning?" Mary poured the coffee.

"I'm starving. Could I get some poached eggs on toast and bacon please?"

"You got it," she said, turned sharply, and went to the grill.

She sure sounds cheery for being stuck in this place with that lazy husband of hers.

Relishing every bite, she ate her breakfast slowly. She picked up the local newspaper lying on the chair and started to read, but couldn't concentrate. The fight loomed in her mind. One of many fights. She tried to calm him, but he was so angry. It wasn't supposed to end this way. At one time they were in love. She tossed the paper back on the chair. *I'm not going to let him spoil my breakfast. No one will ever spoil my breakfast again. He never gets up before eleven on the weekends. He won't get up this time. No need to worry.*

Her stomach was queasy. Tears were welling up in her eyes. *No, I have cried far too much. I won't.*

Mary came over and set the bill on her table.

"You sure you're all right, Mrs. Baker?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Thanks for the lovely breakfast."

"It's nice to see you again. You sure look good."

You look terrible. I bet that Joe treats you like a slave, too. Maybe you should come with me. We could share a room. God I'm funny. Better get going.

"Thank you, Mary. Goodbye."

Leaving the money on the table, Carol walked across the restaurant, her heels click-clacking with each step. The men stared. *Why do you look at me? Don't you have wives at home? Sure. Cooking? Cleaning? Hiding a black eye or worse? No use being angry anymore.*

In the car she opened the windows and let the wind rush in. On the radio Aretha's voice belted out, "Chain, chain, chain, chain of fools." She couldn't help but sing along. *After twenty-seven awful years....I'm free from those chains.*

Carol drove into the parking lot, looked in the mirror and again fluffed her hair and adjusted her earrings. She was ready. Strutting through the door, she walked up to the desk and addressed the tall, dark officer.

"Excuse me, sir," she said smiling. "I would like to report a murder."