

Cheap

By Mahalia Solages

The morning was crisp and the color of smoke when we drove to Gary's sprawling home in a gated community. The interior reflected calculated décor with the gilded, half moon foyer table pulling from the tones in the Kilim runner. The bright open kitchen had a long counter with a trio of candlesticks on the end overlooking the informal eating area with window seating and a wire basket filled with fresh fruit. The Laura Ashley fabric coordinated with tufted fabric on the ribbon back Ethan Allen chairs. The family of clear glass ducks sat equidistantly on the windowsill, next to the dishwashing liquid concealed in a fluted teardrop bottle. The narrow delicate sideboard with carved feet held family photos in matching whitewashed frames.

"Jen may be better at fishing than I am," I heard Gary say as I faded into the conversation he was having with my boyfriend. Sleek magnets held random photos and school itineraries on the refrigerator.

"Want some coffee kid?" Gary held the stainless pot and awaiting mug.

"Thank you."

Gary and my boyfriend continued to pack a cooler that they dragged to the driveway, loading it in the Mako, as I was informed, while my boyfriend parked his Explorer in the driveway.

"Get in doll, or do you need a step stool?" Gary chuckled continuing, "this is a Ford super duty F-350 King Ranch sugar."

We were heading south to Miami, then on to Bimini for some Mahi Mahi fishing. When we reached one of the tolls, Gary started discussing with the attendant about a twenty-five cent difference when a vehicle has more than two axles. He yelled and berated until she gave in, lifting the bar because it wasn't worth the upset when she could clearly see the trailer.

"Take the goddamn seventy five cents then if you want it so bad," Gary said throwing the correct change in her face, continuing to chuckle with my boyfriend for the next two exits.

"I was just fuckin' with her," Gary laughed glancing in his side mirror at his tri axle trailer. "Yo, she could have been your aunt, man. Did you hear her trying to explain? She tried!" Gary teased my boyfriends' Mexican heritage.

"I didn't understand her at all, you know I don't 'eh-speakee espanitch'," my boyfriend denounced.

The mood lightened as the sun rose finally coasting out on the twenty foot fully loaded boat, with a Bimini top, I was informed. Gary shared that 'Jen' owned her own mortgage company, adding that his kids were great, and he couldn't wait for their next vacation. He addressed me in waves, the crests contained pleasantries, helping me with the pole belt and tips, then sliding into the troughs saying that my 'kind of friends' probably didn't know this kind of living.

With effort, I caught a single Mahi to the near dozen they collected. Gary cleaned and bagged the filets while I helped ice them in a cooler, not once did he offer for me to take my catch because on the way home he muttered to my boyfriend that I wasn't supposed to be on this excursion.

"Hey doll, check all around you to make sure you didn't drop anything-weave pieces, wrappers, watermelon peels, whatever!" Gary ignorantly insulted my Eritrean background.

"What?"

My boyfriend piped in to say that 'Jen' was home now and she was unaware of my presence, on this trip and in his life.

"Dude, your last girl was a blond and at least out of elementary school," Gary said under his breath.

My boyfriend continued to inform me that they would drop me off at the entrance of the complex where I was to wait at the pool.

I sat at the desolate pool, the straps of the loungers wrapped around me in a fierce grip of constricting anger. I was embarrassed and disappointed for leaving my purse tucked under my boyfriend's passenger seat. The tears streamed invalidation and in that moment, I had to accept feeling cheap.

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