

## Love Won't Wait, but It Will Stop Here

by Reggie Cuyler, Jr.

I'm a good woman, you know, the type hadn't been kissed until her sophomore year of high school, or like the timid virgin that didn't give herself up until a drunken summer night her third year of undergrad. People that knew me would never believe that my name was rotating in and out of gossip circles coupled with words like 'desperate, lonely, cougar, or easy'. Despite any of their skeptics, deep down, I knew that those pseudonyms were fitting. I'm an editor for the Scoop, an indie celebrity gossip magazine in the Greater Boston area. Going to work wasn't always a drag. I used to look forward to being there but now, a day on the job was nothing more than an eight hour bout of uncomfortable stares and awkward conversation. In the office at The Scoop, perception rules, so you can pretty much get the picture of what could be said about a thirty-three year old bachelorette that's dated a handful of studs on the same staff, and one of their relatives.

No mystery here, that damsel is me and a day of work for starts with a reluctant trudge from my bed straight to closet. Yep, skip the shower. No need for it, I always take one the night before, in which ten times out ten I spend cuddling with nothing other than sheets and pillows. The closest that I come to a hot sweat between the sheets, is having a nightmare. Well, except that time when Chance, my college sweetheart came passing through town. Our past relationship was awkward. It was one of the he's my boyfriend, but I'm not his girlfriend type of deals. Needless to say I woke up the next morning from his visit sticky, naked, and unsurprisingly alone. I called him a few times for good measure, and to shoot out the idea picking up where we left off years back. It was a shot in the dark I was to willing aim for. However, the next time I heard from him was in the form a postcard relaying the details of his upcoming wedding, a couple weeks later. That cleared all hope that I was making him curious enough to pop the question that I've been waiting to hear for nearly the last decade.

After climbing out of the arms of my sheets, I diligently sort through my wardrobe to mix and match the most attention grabbing combination possible. I follow trends closer than a flock of pigeons trails the unlucky senior citizen that tossed crumbs at them. The pouch forming at my waist area, and the occasional grey streaks that I pluck on sight, constantly reminded me of how early I was born. To keep myself young I make sure that every latest style of heel, designer bag and accessory is housed behind the mirrored doors on my walk-in closet. Once I pick an outfit, I second-guess myself a few times before I finally decide on something that I think could reel in a potential

husband. Even though I had already given every man that meets my standards at the Scoop a decent shot at love, the chances of someone new popping up is still a possibility.

Usually I make my way down the narrow hallway towards my desk at least half an hour before eight o'clock so that I won't have to run into any of my mishaps. Dodging all of them on a given day is about as difficult as getting a crab to walk to straight. But I'd rather fail miserably than not give it a shot at all. The plain black and white name plate that reads "Jeana Leaf" in capital letters hangs on to the outside of my quarter of the four person cubicle near the entrance of the building. My space is never the way that I left it the evening before. A lead that I'm working on would disappear or a not-so anonymous, anonymous hate letter would be stuck to the monitor of my desktop by a dot of olive green silly-putty. The latest note commented 'Go to hell fat-ass' in orange ink. Each O wore a smiley face in the middle. The neon colored, embossed times new roman font that reads "Love won't wait, but it will stop here" dances around the twenty-one inch LCD screen behind it. With no family photos or other objects that makes a workspace personable, the quote is hard to overlook in my bland cubicle. Well at least whenever it isn't obstructed by one of the strange derogatory notes. The mystery wasn't hard to crack. I'm more than positive that the sender of the messages is the bitter wife of the man that made me subscribe to the quote on my screensaver. I don't blame her in slightest. I would do worse than send hardly threatening letters to the woman that my husband had an affair with.

Greg was the first enlisted to my roster of bad decisions. His six foot six NBA star frame and bone straight teeth screamed for my attention; a pair of dimples sit just below his masculine cheek bones on his clean shaven face. We ran into each other by default, I was a newbie and he was the boss, simple as that. Learning the protocol of the office was quickly clouded by taking up every opportunity to flirt on both of our behalf. I wasn't surprised when he asked me out to lunch off the record. I was so interested that he could have demanded me to come and I still would have went along with it. I knew that my hands were getting a little dirty but a measly fifty grand a year salary wasn't enough for me pass up meeting my future hubby. At the time I was thirty two, the gears in my biological clock were alive and kicking, I had not a second to spare. Most of our conversations revolved around his would've, could've, should've basketball dreams from college. I couldn't tell the difference between a touchdown or a homerun before I met him, but I did my homework just so I could keep up.

Apparently he was an ACC All American guard out of Boston College, but blew out his knee midseason his Junior year. He attributed the injury to the decline of his

draft stock to go pro, but I had the gut feeling that he wasn't that good in the first place. If I was given a brick every time I heard the 'I was supposed to be a star' sob story I could build my own rendition of the Sphinx. Nonetheless his pretentious banter about college basketball wasn't enough to turn me off. However it was enough to distract me from the circular line of tanned skin on his left ring finger. It wasn't until our affair had grown a few weeks old before I received a phone call from the Mrs., asking why I had been texting and calling him so late. It all came out, like my love handles in a two piece. Needless to say our early evening escapades disguised as late nights at the office came to an end, and his flattering compliments were replaced with her hate mail. It didn't make things any easier when I later found out that she was his secretary. I could only imagine how their relationship started. "Love won't wait, but it made a stop here," is what he said in an attempt to assuage the hostile feelings I developed towards our situation. He was right though, Love didn't wait, and neither did he waste any time in cutting things off. It wasn't the first time and nowhere close to the last. Ever since then, that idea has made its way into all of my subsequent relationships.

Disposing of the misdirected fan mail from Greg's wife in the handwoven basket at the foot of my cherrywood desk brought back memories of Darik. He had such a way with words that I wouldn't have been surprised if could sweet talk a degree out of a mime school. I frequented the Gold's Gym downtown to fight the noticeable deceleration of my metabolism. Scoping out potentials was a bonus. I saw him in the mirror from behind while I was on a tread-mill. It was easy to spot his shirtless toned body, tanned skin, and jet black hair that hung to middle of his back. He's full blood Wampanoag, and he wasn't modest at all in showing it. After noticing how amazing fit he appeared to be, the tribal tattoos that covered most of the skin that wasn't hidden by his gym shorts caught my eye.

His back was angled and he was spinning his torso in a circular motion that made me wince with each rotation. Pretending to be intrigued by his erratic movements I sparked a conversation in light of it, hoping he could carry on from there. Once I got closer I spotted wooden bracelets on his wrists and ankles. Before I could ask he boasted that his grandmother makes all types of crafts and jewelry that were indigenous to his tribe. Our small talk eventually turned into a coffee date, and we hit it off from there. I would go for hours on end listening to him jaw it up about stories from his reservation back home. There weren't too enticing, but he would cleverly weave a compliment or two about me somewhere in the mix, so I couldn't complain. Months went by and things were getting more serious by the day.

Well at least on my behalf. Silly me, it was just my luck that I wasn't the only dugout on the river to Darik's heart. His flattery kept me oblivious to the simultaneous relationships that he was pursuing. My run in with his other lover was nothing less than a shit show. Darik and I had developed a healthy competition on the dart board, so we would go on dates and shoot for the bull's eye. It was one of the things that we both equally enjoyed doing, until Gilbert caught wind of it and he didn't take it lightly. Apparently he and Darik had been dating on and off for a year and I was single handedly destroying the couple. I thought it was a joke until darts flew at moving, breathing, targets and tables and chairs followed suit. Darik repeatedly exclaimed, "Baby, calm down!" I was standing still, so to my confirmation 'baby' was the five foot three man with shoulder length blonde streaked hair wreaking havoc. His black and purple zebra print tank top hang loosely from his slim frame and his skin tight leggings sported a tear in the seat after he squatted to flip a bar stool. Darik's love definitely didn't wait, but it made stop here with me, and turned his relationship upside down in the process.

Darik and I had a terrible falling out after that fiasco. We went from calling and texting on a daily basis, to complete excommunication. If I had to make a guess we wouldn't have seen each other again. That was until Greg introduced the newest account manager to The Scoop's staff, Darik Foxe. Greg would encourage the staff to get to know Darik and feel at home, all the while I was well aware of everything that I did and didn't want to know about him.

He's the hardest of all of my mistakes to avoid because we are opposites. I come to work early, he comes late. On top of that his cubicle is within shouting distance. Every now and then I can hear his bellowing voice from my desk. In order for him to get to work he has to pass by me, and unfortunately he won't pass up the opportunity to make small talk. Regardless if he's genuinely trying to make conversation, I feel like he is only trying to stay on my good side because I know too much.

Our talks never last long before Lenny shows up and rudely steps directly between us. Externally it seemed like he was only doing his job by emptying the basket that Darik re-gifted me from his grandma, but there was much more going on. Bluntly speaking, Lenny was a mistake, a huge one at that. His presence is always a double edged sword. He's awkward enough to make Darik leave, which is great, but at the same time that usually leaves me with him alone. Lenny came into the picture when Darik and I cut things off.

A woman has needs, and I was missing the essential three. Attention, affection, and appreciation, the three As. I was getting less attention than a statistics professor. I was dead to the opposite sex, I felt like I couldn't even pry a stare out of a truck driver at a strip club. So it isn't a surprise that my feelings of affection and appreciation followed suit on the low end.

It was a cold, lonely, and late night at the office. I was editing a last minute article that Greg was trying to force into the April issue of the magazine. Submissions are due to the corporate office by 10pm on the second Thursday of the month so that everything could be screened and printed by Friday afternoon. That's never a problem until Greg decided that a lead about the mayor cheating on his wife would be a hot topic at four o'clock, Thursday, how ironic. And guess who was the unlucky editor that he appointed to stay late to work on it, none other than yours truly.

The stress that he brought piled on top of being lonely led me to make a decision that I wish that I could take back like a dress that didn't fit. Watching everybody else pass by on the way out while I had to stay behind clouded my judgment even worse than it already was. In addition to them being scott-free while I was caged in my cubicle, I had to see my ex-flings walk by. Every time one would approach I did my best to put on the impression that I was absorbed in the article. Especially when Greg came by hand in hand with his secretary that he molded into a wife. The phony compliment he made about my work ethic nearly brought the Sushi I had for lunch back up onto my desk.

The reasoning behind me getting assigned to his nonsense was obvious. The devious grin that accessorized his wife's oval shaped face and layers of make-up made it apparent. My morale went down along with the sun by the time it hit six o'clock. After the day staff exited the building, the overnight cleaning crew came for their second shift opposite of the one in the morning.

Night fall had set in and I couldn't take another second of editing. The screeching vacuum cleaners and rustling garbage bags were unbearable to work through. I picked up the three month old issue of Cosmo that I had been looking at during my downtime on the job. "Top 25 Studs of 2010", was the article in particular that I found myself lusting over on regular basis, especially since the catalog was about the closest that I could get to the real thing. Eight-packs of abs that looked like cartons of eggs hiding behind tank tops and muscle shirts brought back too many memories that I didn't mind recalling.

My date with nostalgia quickly drew to a close with the interjection of a strained raspy voice. "Do you need your trash emptied?" the stranger said. I raised my eyes slowly from the man's feet to his collar bones. I could see the definition of his quads protruding through his dark brown slacks. His biceps and pecs bulged out from the armholes and chest area of the tan collared shirt that had a few buttons left undone. There was no telling if they were undone for show or because it just plain out didn't fit. Either way it got my rusty gears running. Just from looking at his body my mind drew blank. It seemed as if one of the guys from my magazine read my pathetic thoughts and appeared right in front of me. By the time I shook off my trance, I looked up and stared directly into Lenny's beady little eyes that were spaced too far apart. His thin, dry lips bared more cracks than an old sidewalk. If I had to guess he hadn't seen a barber in months based off of how untamed his tufts of brown curls arranged his scalp, and his tangled beard spread across his face.

Despite his unsightly facial features, I couldn't deny the feeling that the sight of his frame gave me. If it isn't obvious yet, I'm a sucker for the type that likes to stay in shape. I like being able to see that a man works on his figure before he can even open his mouth to tell me. It's still vivid in my mind despite how bad I've been trying to forget it all. Shortly after we exchanged a few words, we were alone in the janitor's office, and I got a chance to see firsthand the muscular guns that was concealed by his uniform. Immediately after our escapade, I was ashamed of how low I'd stooped. I didn't bother to tell him good night, or falsely commend him on his subpar performance. The lead that, Greg assigned me didn't make it to far either. I didn't bother to come up with an excuse as to why I left the lead hanging. I was more concerned with my bottomless morals.

So now he takes the few minutes that he stops by each morning to empty out my waste basket to hint that he our one night fiasco wasn't enough. Unfortunately for him I had had more than enough, twice over. Once again love didn't bother to wait but it made a stop here, and honestly I would have been better off if it had kept rolling.

Greg wasn't happy about missing the deadline for his hypocritical lead and I'm still on the chopping block. Deep down I knew that it was grounds for me being terminated, but I guess one of only perks of my whole ordeal is the art of black mail. My job was saved by a thread that dangled from the coat tail of my shameful past. Greg's ultimatum to firing me was my threat to expose our dealings back when I was a trainee to the corporate office. Judging from the Scoop's zero tolerance policy he would have been a fool to jeopardize his six figure salary for a bland story that didn't get done on time.

The same secret that saved my job backfired on me like a jalopy with a bad spark plug. Even though I didn't do any of the talking about what happened between Greg and I, his jealous wife sneakily spread the word throughout the office. 'Jeana the lonely, desperate home-wrecker' is at it again. It wasn't enough for me to try to steal her husband, according to her I had the nerve to turn around and threaten his job after an unsuccessful stab at it. Give me a break, she's pitiful. But apparently she was able to recruit enough followers to make my every waking moment at work uncomfortable. To make matters worse, Darik and Lenny found their way into the mix and made it into a nasty spill that isn't worth cleaning up. Her hate mail kept me well up to date about the mess I made. Turns out that despite Lenny's massive figure, he's a nineteen year old college dropout that used to play inside linebacker for the state university, which tacked the title 'cougar' to my resume. It doesn't stop there, the word surfaced that my pseudo-lover, Chance was marrying Darik's sister. I'm just as surprised as next person, but now that they are in-laws, I was no longer known as 'Jeana the lonely, cougar' I was 'Jeana, the lonely, desperate, easy, cougar'.

In the midst of the standoff that was created between Greg and I, he hired Jerry to pick up my slack. He's an intern starting his sophomore year majoring in Journalism at the same university that Lenny called it quits at. The way he carries himself drew me like a mosquito to a tiki lamp. I don't have time to waste so we've been seeing each other for a few weeks. I can see us developing into something worthwhile. I haven't told him why it's a must that we leave work twenty minutes early just to have more time together, but he'll be fine as long as doesn't cross paths with Greg, Lenny, Darik, Chance or Greg's wife. I know, there's probably a lesson I should have learned somewhere in the mix, but the one I'm well aware of is, love won't wait and I want his to stop here.