

The Six-Year Itch

by Natalie McNabb

Judd hands me file after file: a white label with eleven-point Times New Roman font, all caps, on each.

I point my toe upward to stretch my heel and, straightening the folders, say, “I’ll get on these.” As I walk toward my desk I know he’s ogling, but it no longer bothers me.

“We’re set for tomorrow?” he asks. It’s not a question.

I turn around to face him, because I know he hates it when I don’t. “You fly out at eleven p.m. First class was fifty dollars more with points. I confirmed a late arrival tonight with The Bellagio and the lunch tomorrow with your niece.” *Niece, my ass.* She didn’t sound eighteen. More like my age, thirty-two. “The week’s correspondence is in your briefcase. And, no colored paper clips, just like you like.” I grin at the last bit, but feel as if I just read him the grocery list stuck to my computer monitor. *Detergent. Vino. Bread. Tampons. Peanut butter.*

Judd just stands there staring at me.

The forever-leaf-dropping Ficus drops yet another leaf near my foot. It’s five forty, and I should get the shopping in before my son’s baseball practice at six thirty.

Judd finally moves—walks across the room, lifts his black overcoat and scarf from the rack, and takes his hat from another hook. He says, “You made reservations?” Again, not a question.

“For two at six thirty.” Another niece, but this one’s the ginger haired thing slinking around the first floor.

“Tell Jan I’ve got a meeting.”

I nod. “I sent Jan some anniversary flowers. Roses.”

“Oh. Yes. Thank you.”

Jan will have the house, cars and twins someday.

Judd winks at me as he exits. He doesn’t mean anything by it. It’s just habit. Still, I feel as if I should shower every time. There must be something better than this, something better than copying, stapling, and paper clipping my way through divorce, custody, and legal separation files while Judd gets his rocks off. I swore I’d find another job, but that became *one day* and *one day* became *someday*. Six years later, here I sit. Just like Jan. *If not now, then when?* I could go back to answering calls for dad at the treatment plant. *It’s a shitty job*, everyone always says, but they don’t know what shitty is. I lift the handset to dial Jan.

“Nash residence,” she says.

I can’t speak.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Jan,” I say. “Happy anniversary.”

“Thanks, Nancy. How’re you?”

“Fine.” But, my sister says ‘fine’ is just an acronym for ‘fucked up, insecure, neurotic, and emotional.’ And, she’s right. “Judd asked me to call and see if you’d meet him at Daniel’s for dinner.”

“How nice,” Jan says. “What time?”

“Six thirty.” *But, seven would give Judd and the ginger hair time to get settled before Jan showed up.* “Wait. Reservations are at seven.” My heart thuds. “He realizes it’s last minute, but—”

“That’s alright. I’ll be there.”

“I’ll let him know.”

“Thank you, Nancy. Have a good evening.”

“You too.” Oh, god, the guilt. It’s not fair. She won’t see it coming. But, it’s going to happen anyway, and Jan’s beautiful and has family money. She won’t have to paperclip, staple and copy her way through her twins’ upbringing. I breathe in, trying to calm myself. When I push the pile of folders off the edge of my desk though, somehow I feel better. I remove my office key from my key ring, place the key on my desk, and send an email to Judd that says “I QUIT” in eleven-point Times New Roman font, all caps.

As Judd enters the parking garage, he pulls his keys from his coat pocket and whispers to himself, “Too bad that one’s the help.”

Jan retrieves the long-stemmed roses, still in the vase, from the yard waste bin while dialing the neighbor girl, Madeleine, who sat for them last year.

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<http://www.short-humour.org.uk/5writersshowcase/thesixyearitch.htm>.