

4. IDYLL IN EVANSVILLE

CAN YOU FIT INTO THIS WARDROBE?

I have created this scene for you. It is your paradise.

The corn is over eight feet tall. It dwarfs a car traveling along the rural road. The evening haze already settles over as the sun goes down. A few birds dart over the tall stalks. There is an unsettling quality about it all, a feeling of doom.

She knows the promise of the late summer. She can feel it pulse through her bones as she accelerates. All the windows are open, and the wind rushes through her hair. She sits back and takes it all in. She can feel the rush of the moment.

When she gets back to her place on the outskirts of Evansville, the high is still hovering over her. She loves that feeling and doesn't want to let go. She can't let go.

She wants to drink. But she's promised herself that she's not going to drink tonight. She needs something to take off that edge. She can't sit still. She collapses on the couch and stares into space. TV would only be an immediate let down. She sense that she is on to something, and doesn't want to give up while she still has a chance.

"I want to be happy."

She feels that time is running out. Even as this high dissipates, it is all coming apart. She wants to keep it natural. But she isn't good at that anymore. Her past is gaining on her.

Interstate 164 weaves around the city. It's not as if this is a great metropolis with its massive traffic. But Highway 41 moves at a snail's pace. And sometimes she just loves the speed.

Her visitors seems to come in and out all day. At a moment like this, she is glad to take a rest. Even the evening is going to be full of activity.

She gets a call, "What exit am I supposed to take?"

"I've told you that a hundred times. I thought that you'd remember after this."

She can't tell if she's talking to someone new. Or is the same guy over and over again. She finds most of these types rude as hell. She wishes that she didn't have to deal with any of them. Donny promised to send a little money her way if she would just help out. And she wants to do anything that she can to keep the marriage together.

One of the customers is a little aggressive, "Darling, I can give you a little extra if you give me a little extra."

"What are you talking about? A couple of hundred dollars. I clear more than that helping out in a night."

"No, I'm talking real money. A thousand dollars."

She thinks about what that means free and clear. She wouldn't have to give Donny a cut. Save it up as her ticket out of here.

"I don't think that I want to get into the habit of that sort of thing. Besides, how do I know that you'll actually give me the thousand?"

He takes his money out and counts ten crisp one hundred dollar bills."

"Is this enough to make a difference?"

Looking at the money is making her high. But she can't imagine this jerk crawling all over her.

She makes him an offer that he can only refuse, "I'll suck you off for the five hundred."

"Honey, I know that you don't mean that."

She doesn't mean it in the least. She watches him take his money back.

He aims his parting shot, "Babe, why are you wasting your time in a gig like this?"

"Don't you wonder the same thing?"

"You've got real talent. It's not going to last!"

The next morning she is in the dumps. Her man's been on the road for a five days. And she is heading for her real job. She work at the Pilot gas station on I-64 at the exit for Highway 41. Coffee doesn't do the trick. She wishes that she could add a little something to the mix. Not now, not today. She muddles through the day with the reminder that she'll have to deal with his shit another evening.

He comes back the next day. He's looking a little skittish.

He asks her, "You're not using the stuff?"

What made him so moralistic? It's not as if she's with him for his charming personality. "I'm trying not to. It's just hard getting by. You're away so much."

"We need to save money."

"You look exhausted."

She wonders what really keeps him on the road. She doesn't think that the marriage can survive the strain.

By the next day he's disappeared again. He's told her that he's going to be home late tonight, maybe he won't even come home. She just heads for the open road, the way to Terre Haute. There's a strange glow in the twilight. She's a little mesmerized by it as she watches a front roll over in the distant sky.

She rides like the wind as she races as far away from her life as she can get. Far enough still isn't as good as it can get. As she races ahead, she does everything that she can do avoid a vehicle slowing down in front of her. As she rights herself on the highway, she skims along the shoulder. She can't brace herself and her car plunges in a ditch.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!"

How is she going to explain this one? Her Honda CRT is new. She never imagined this. She can't drive out of this one. She's afraid of worse damage. Time to call the the towing service.

As she waits, she curses her fate. She just wanted to get away, and now she has only been reminded of her life. This was not at all what she expected. The darkness descends before the tow truck arrives. It is a deep darkness. And it seems like the truck takes forever.

When he finally is able to pull her out, she is relieved. Luckily for her, there is no damage just some mud to clean off.

"Thanks a lot. I thought that I was screwed for sure."

She heads back home with a sense of relief. She drives slower than usual. Just to make it back in one piece is sufficient consolation.

Donny is nowhere to be seen. At least, she doesn't have to deal with any of his bull shit customers. That is the best that she can hope for. She really doesn't want to tell him about the mishap. But it would be nice to be able to share her woes with someone.

She gets a coke and passes out watching TV. The next day, she's off. She values her

time like this. Just dawdling around or going to the gym. Something to while away the hours. She realizes that she'll have to cover for Donny later in the day. That's the least of her concerns. For now, she's on her time. So be it.

What if Donny never came home? She doesn't want to think about it that way. She could leave on her own volition. Maybe she's thankful that he took her back. It's not that great, but things were a lot worse. For the time being, that's why she's staying put.

Just before rush hour, she has to make a pick up for Donny. She's a little lost and has to call her connection on the cell phone.

"You already have the apartment number. We're in the Green River Road subdivision off of Exit 3 on I-164. You'll see a hospital and a large church. The angels will lead you the rest of the way.

"I don't see a thing."

She's growing impatient with these promises of salvation. She's seen the light. But how long has it really lasted. And everyone around her seems like heathens. No Messiah is going to come to this forsaken place.

Somehow she is able to make it out of the darkness. She knocks on the light wood door and is escorted into an empty apartment.

"You haven't moved in yet."

"We just like it this way. The carpet is so plush that you can sleep on it. You have the money."

"What money? I'm here to pick up a package."

He laughs, "Don't fuck with me, girl."

These small time hoods are nothing.

"You've got your meth lab in the bathroom?"

"The less questions the better."

He is trying to affect gangster banter. He's just a good old boy from downstate with the emphasis on the boy.

"Why don't you turn down your music? I can hardly hear a word that you're saying."

"Are you into country music, sweet thing?"

"I'm into getting the job done."

"Just let the angels guide you home."

She hasn't felt any more enlightened from the experience. These cats could be a lot more trouble. But even all this shit isn't worth it to her. It seems that she is always doing pick up. She wonders where Donny found this new place. He's always undercutting everyone else around here. It's his technique. On the road all the time, he hears a lot of stories. It helps him keep his edge.

He's also good with the cops. Some of them have no idea. Others look the other way. For most, he's just a worn-down driver trying to keep ahead.

It was only in the last few years that Donny got into trucking. He'd been a small-timer after high school. When he was in his early twenties, he hooked up with her. He seemed like he had it together. She was still in her teens and was impressed by his swagger. He figured that he couldn't stay in the business forever. He needed something else on the side.

She never thought that it would end up this way. Maybe she just got too caught up in the

high life. For a while, he was buying her everything that she could desire. Then he realized that she was almost a liability. He had hooked her with her habit. But he started to get sick of the evasions. If he didn't have something to keep her interested, she'd go hunting on her own. It took a while before she quieted down, before she took care of things.

As part of cleaning up, she took the job at Pilot. It gave her an independence that she really didn't have before. But it also reminded her of the trap called Evansville.

When she gets home, she tosses the package on the couch. It's going to be a crazy evening and she needs to be prepared.

As the evening wears on, she gets a call from her money man from the other day.

"I'm not making deliveries today."

"My offer still stands."

"You didn't have enough then, what makes me think that you can make it happen now?"

"I'm having a few friends over. It's a party."

"My husband doesn't like me mixing business with pleasure."

This is more about mixing pleasure with business. I'm sure that you're not having a whole lot of fun with Donny out of town."

He is working her boredom to his advantage. She ends up jumping on I-164 to look for another one of these subdivisions.

"I told you that it was a house way past the housing community."

Sure enough, she finds the place. It looks like a relic from another time. A fire is going hard. One of the roommates is feeding a bit bull chicken that's he's just cooked.

"He told me that you were coming. I didn't think that you were this fine. They're all inside."

The dog is yelping. Another one of the mutts comes over for his turn.

"Pretty sophisticated place that you've got."

"We've got some stuff that you can snort. And some stuff that you can smoke. Whatever you want. But you should know all that."

"That's really not my speed. Besides, I thought that I was delivering to you."

"I'm just trying to be hospitable. How about some whisky?"

"Really?"

"I've got some fine Kentucky whisky."

She wonder if it's moonshine. Whatever, the stuff goes down smooth.

A bunch of his friends are making a ruckus in the other room. He pulls her into his study. It's quieter there. She stretches out on the couch. He sits across from her.

"You have a great body."

"You've been looking at my ass."

"You're the one wearing tight jeans. You know what I could do with you."

"Just keep the whisky coming."

In the back of her mind, she remembers a time in rehab. Maybe it was all a figment. She tells herself that it's all over. That kind of thing is part of her distant past, and she isn't going to get sucked back into it.

"Let me massage your feet."

"You're lucky I came out here. My instincts told me no."

“I’ve given you your money. You have nothing to worry about.”

“That’s not the part that worries me.”

“You love the danger. You live on it.”

She knows that paradise has to offer more than a taste of its delights. She hates to wait. The whisky is enough to dull her worries. Only a little bit, and she’s already sailing into oblivion. Maybe it’s the fatigue. The constant worry.

“I used to get into the romance of it all. Now I want all that to go away.”

“You’re still young. But it won’t always be like that.”

“Don’t I know it. I’ve seen too much already.”

“You’re not the least bit worse for wear.”

“That’s not a come on.”

She supposes that she could give in. She was like that in the day. If Donny couldn’t come through, she’d find someone else with the goods. But that was all part of her past.

She doesn’t really feel the appeal of the drugs; she just craves that attention. That could be all that she needs. And he doesn’t look half bad.

“I’ve been calling you Dusty. What is your real name?”

“Barry.”

She puts out her hand, “Glad to make your acquaintance, Barry.”

She reintroduces herself to Barry. As she repeats her name, she feels it is just something that she made up for the moment.

“You have a pretty name.”

For the moment she feels a little down on herself. Compliments have just seemed in short supply. Anything to get her spirits up.

what is your real name

what is your real name

what is your real name

Her mind wanders. Probably the affects of the alcohol. Barry seems so attractive in this light. She feels like she’s wasting her life. She could really use a little ego boost.

She isn’t going to sleep with another guy just because Donny is away on a trip. It’s not exactly her style. There was a time when she would have been an easy mark. A lot has changed. She has grown quite a bit. The offer seems tempting.

As she settles in, Barry decides to leave her be. She can hear the party rocking in the other room. She wants to jump up and be part of the action. But she loves the chill state that she has now attained. She doesn’t even want to move.

Relaxation is an art that she has perfected. Now, it is her only real escape from rigors of everyday.

“You just have to relax. Hold out!”

If only he could hold her. Reassure her.

She finds that she is drifting. She doesn’t want to pass out in a strange house. Her eyes are getting heavier. She can’t resist.

She hates the fact that she is so defenseless at a moment like this. She is trying to recover. Trying to get her wits about her. She grips the arm rest of the couch. As her grip loosens, she fades from consciousness.

When she wakes up, the house is almost empty. One guy is walking around and doing odd chores. The mess from last night has been pretty well cleaned up.

“Hi, I’m Lawrence.”

“Morning. Where is everybody?”

They talk a while. He tells her about his accident.

“Some guy cut me off. I gave him the finger, and he just rammed my truck. I’m going to be OK soon.”

She wishes that she could say that about her psychological state.

“I better get back. I’ve got to work today. Nice meeting you Lawrence.”

She doesn’t have to be in until 11. When she gets back to the house, Donny is nowhere to be seen. He obviously didn’t come back last night. She really isn’t hungover. But she feels herself dragging for the rest of the day.

When Donny comes home that night, he seems more than pissed.

“I hear that you passed out at Barry’s.”

“I have nothing to hide from you.”

“You probably weren’t going to tell me.”

“I stopped by with a package. I had some drinks.”

“I told you that it’s not safe to go to their place.”

“Nothing happened.”

“You passed out with money on you.”

“It was safe.”

“They really could have fucked you up. I feel like shooting that miserable shit.”

“Barry was a perfect gentleman which is more than I can say for you.”

“You’re starting to act like a whore again.”

“Don’t say that kind of thing to me.”

”I really don’t know who’d be willing to put up with you now. You’re not the sweet young thing of seventeen that I remember. You’re looking might frayed around the edges.” He knew how to hurt when he wanted. It wasn’t as if she committed any real offense except to stay with him. He wasn’t exactly endearing himself to her at this moment. But that didn’t make it any easier to leave.

“I don’t know what I’m supposed to say to that. I can’t say I’m sorry because it’s not exactly like I did anything.”

“Really now. Haven’t you been gallivanting with your new chums until all hours of the night?”

“Any thing that I’ve done is what I’ve told. I have no secrets from you. I have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“You want me to believe that.”

“You’ll believe whatever you want. You do anyway.”

“You are a whore.”

“I’m your whore if that’s how you’ll have it.”

“I don’t know how you can even show your face.”

“I’ll wear a veil if it will make you feel any better.”

“You’re being real shit.”

“I’m the one. You’re giving me little choice here. You’re never here, and when you are, you’re less than civil.”

She leaves the room. She doesn’t want to put up with any more of his bull. This has taken too much of her time. She needs to get out of here while she can.

She’s not ready to leave. It would be so easy. She could keep driving forever. She’s thought about this moment again and again.

He would never follow her. Their time together is already a living hell. He would take it as victory that she ran away. She’s gone over this again and again. That was why she was so crazy when she was younger. She couldn’t face herself. The wearing grind of day to day needs to be her solace. She has sacrificed. And she will do more.

Donny put up with her when she was wild. But he doesn’t seem as accepting now. She has given up too much of her freedom to him. And he just takes advantage of this. Is there nothing else that she can do to make things easier.

By the time she gets back to the house, he has crashed. She sleeps on the couch.

She wonders what she is waiting for to change her life. It’s not as if paradise is going open up for her in the Indiana sky. And she’s not going to win the lottery.

Today she changes her routine. She heads into Kentucky. When she was a kid, she’d cross the state line with her friends and sneak alcohol. It just seemed like more of a place of sin than Evansville. The bridge to Henderson is a lot slower today. They are doing construction. The lanes have been made smaller to accommodate an extra towards Indiana. She takes the opposite direction.

Once in Henderson, she wonders why she made the trip. She could have gone to the casino before she crossed the bridge, but it really had no appeal for her. She makes a left off of the main road. She sees a bar.

It’s not really in her interest to get trashed in Kentucky. That is ancient history.

The inside of the bar is nice and cool. It is a hot day. And the chill hits her. As the daylight closes behind, she feels that is being transported to a different place. It’s not as if the other patrons have the slightest idea what is going on with her. No one looks up from his drink. Even the bartender is oblivious until she makes it a point to get his attention.

“I don’t think that I’ve seen you in here before.”

“I’ve never been here.”

“You from out of town.”

“I live across the river in Evansville.”

“What are you hiding?”

“What do you mean?”

“Most people who come over here from Indiana have a purpose.”

“I was looking to buy a new car.”

She hardly needs a new vehicle. It’s just an excuse not to let him ask too many more questions.

“What are you drinking?”

She’s not really a beer drinker, but a good drink feels good on a day like today. She decides to sit at one of the empty tables. In a while, there’s a few workers getting off their jobs at Wendy’s.

A little later, a young guy in a suit strolls in. He seems almost as bewildered as she does. He talks with the bartender for a few minutes then comes over to her table.

“The bartender told me that you’re interested in a new car. My name is Skip Holmes.”

“I just told him that because he was asking me too many questions.”

“You don’t need a car.”

“That’s my new CRT out there. Although I did get in a little scrape a few days ago.”

“I could give you a deal.”

“No, really don’t need anything.”

“Do you mind if I sit down?”

“Go ahead.”

“You’re not from around here, are you?”

“I live in Evansville.”

“Evansville. I used to live in Evansville. Wait a second! I know you.”

He says her name.

“I go by a different name now. And I’m married.”

“I remember you from Central High.”

“Really!”

“Yeah. All the guys thought you were something else. You were in my math class. But you just ran with a fast crowd. None of us could ever keep up.”

She feels a little flattered, but it’s fine consolation for her present life.

“So Skip are you married?”

“No. I think that I always hoped that I could get a girl like you. I have my own house now.”

“How did you manage that?”

“I was in college for a couple of years. Then one day I came over here for a car. And I thought why not get a job selling cars. So here I am.”

“Is it a tough job?”

“Not at all. Some months nothing seems to move. And then bang, it explodes.”

“I suppose that you don’t move too much during the winter.”

“You’d be surprised what cold snap does to an old car. They’re lining up for a more reliable vehicle.”

“Sounds wild.”

“It can be. I’m never going to get rich doing this. But it’s a living.”

She looks in his eyes. He seems innocent to the world. At least, he hasn’t asked her back to his place.

After a few drinks, the both of them are carrying on pretty good. He takes her by the hand and pulls her into the men’s room. He pulls open the stall and gets out a pen.

“Look at this!”

He writes, “I fucked your wife while you were away on a job!”

They get a good laugh out of that one. She looks up at him as if he wants to kiss her. There is a hesitant pause.

“Our drinks are getting warm,” she says.”

“Yes, they are.”

“You really are such a nice guy Skip. I don’t know. Maybe I should have settled down with someone like you.”

“You don’t look like the settling down type.”

They jump into his convertible and head over to the Pennyrile Parkway. He must be doing at least a hundred.

“Have you ever been pulled over by the cops?”

“Not in this town. I know their habits.”

They both laugh. She sits back and lets her troubles zoom away.

“I really need to get back to town.”

“Why? You said that your husband’s away.”

“That’s the whole point. I can just get into the habit of running away from myself.”

“It sounds like a lot of fun to me. I could be your partner in crime.”

“My days of crime are really over.”

She wonders how much she means it. She’s stopped the damage to herself personally. But she’s still committed to the lifestyle..

When Donny returns, she sees her opportunity.

“I think that we need to get out of the business. You make enough from your truck.”

“Really, I don’t. I’m just covering expenses.”

“I can help out.”

“With what? Turning tricks on the side. I’ve heard about the girls at Pilot.”

“Why are you such a shit? That kind of stuff was cute when I was seventeen. It’s plain abusive now.”

“I’ve never hit you. But you are pushing me.”

“You’re the one who’s making rude comments about me.”

“I’m not the one who’s screwing the customers.”

“You know that’s not true.”

“It’s not for lack of trying. You just ain’t the piece of hot ass that you once were.”

“You’re not nice anymore.”

“I’ve run out of nice.”

“I’m running out of patience for this marriage. I make a suggestion that might help things. Why don’t you get a real job? Other guys do. You could sell cars.”

“What the fuck? There’s nothing lower than a car salesman. He’ll sell you a piece of shit, and then hide when you come looking for him. He’d screw your wife if he had the chance.”

“I guess he has the chance.”

She wonders if she can even hold him anymore. They haven’t slept together in about a month. Part of it has just been schedule. Now she feels that she’s holding out for something bigger.

“Darling, I haven’t got any from you in a while. How about a little hot loving? To say that your sorry.”

“I don’t feel like it. Not after an argument.”

“That’s when it’s the best. You’re all wild like a mountain cat.”

“I can’t stand it. It makes you think that you’re right. I’m sick of it.”

“I’m trying to be friendly.”

“Try another time.”

“If you’re not going to be nicer. There are other places that I could be.”

“If you have somewhere to go, maybe you better head there. I don’t think that I could look at you tonight.”

She uses work the next day to get her mind off the fight. She wants to head over to Henderson. But she won’t give in. Not like this. She can’t use Skip to get her out of her present situation.

Instead, she heads off on one of her rides. She revs up the car and just opens up on 41. There is hardly any traffic. No tractors or what such.

When the windows are all open, her car almost as the same feeling as Skip’s convertible. He’s still such a boy. She could never surrender her wisdom to such innocence. He could never know her struggle.

After a few days, she makes up with Donny. She wants him out of the business, but now isn’t the right time. She is willing to wait. He knows her for that wickedness that is part of her makeup. They both give each other distance. Skip would grow impatient with her petulance. He’s admired her from afar. But he doesn’t know what the ride is like.

With her new confidence, she wants to test things out. The wanderlust has died down. Maybe the temptation is no longer there.

She heads for the bar in Henderson. She sits with her drink at the table. A group of shift workers from the aluminum plant get a little rowdy to celebrate the long weekend. Summer is coming to a close. It’s going to be off the hook the next couple of days. Time to start early.

Skip comes in with a woman and another guy. He looks like he’s with the woman. She watches them all sit down. He motions her over.

He seems apologetic, “These are friends from work.”

“Skip and I went to high school together.”

Skip introduces everyone.

“I’m Kate. I moved from Elizabethtown.”

“Moving up in the world.”

When the bar gets a little crowded, Skip has a suggestion, “I don’t live far from here.”

“I really should be getting back to Evansville.”

“Come with us.”

The other guy begs off. He has to pick up his children from his ex. He’s taking them to Audubon Park for a picnic.”

She feels like she’d be in the way of Kate and Skip. But he keeps insisting. He hardly wants to be alone with Kate.

Skip lives in a modest ranch style house. It was built in the 70's. He gets some beer from the cooler in the garage.

“I’d love to sit on the patio, but it’s a little warm.”

Skip has done his best trying to furnish the place. There’s not a lot of variety in Henderson. He has gone to Owensville to the new mall. He’s been trying.

She watches them all settle in. Kate has been giving Skip the look all night. When she talks, she constantly touches him. After some tense moments, they leave Kate in the living room and go get some more beer in the kitchen.

“Skip, I can go if you want.”

“I can tell her to leave.”

“No, I’ll go. It creeps me out. She has her hands all over you.”

“Stay, I’ll tell her to go.”

“That’s not really what I had in mind.”

She’s not sure what she had in mind. But Kate is making her feel more uncomfortable. It will probably be even worse if Kate leaves. She’ll no longer have an excuse.

When she gets home, Donny is waiting for her.

“Where have you been?”

“I got some drinks in Kentucky.”

“Funny, I was there myself. I had to make a pick up. I stopped for drinks. Some place just off the main street.”

It sounds as if he is following her.

Donny tells her, “I don’t know what it takes to make you happy.”

“I was going to say the same thing to you.”

There’s nothing that he can do. Not any more. It is all beyond his doing. They should have never married. And they are never going to go anywhere together.

She hates that she is being severe. Maybe a vacation would change how she sees things. But then it would be Skip all over again. She has to decide what she wants with her life.

When she was a user, it all made sense. She can’t go back to those days. But when she stopped, it was like they took her identity from her.

She now feels married to her car. She zips away for the evening. She hasn’t given Donny an excuse. She just drove out. That was enough.