

Waiting

The last of the day's light faded away. The silence of the small room was broken by the sound of a striking match. A yellow flame exploded and the smell of burnt sulfur filled the room, casting shadow and partially illuminating an old wrinkled face.

The old wrinkled face belonged to one Eunice Kemper. For the last couple of hours she sat in an old arm chair barely moving, except for the wriggling of her fingers, which she had been doing incessantly. As though it were a movie screen, she kept her gray eyes on the curtain that had been hastily pulled across the main window of her apartment. Her eyes barely strayed from the curtain and when they did her gaze fell only on the black phone that sat on a small round oak table with a dingy white doily. Each time she did, she found her heart racing.

Without much thought, more habit than desire, she took a long drag of her cigarette. They were predicting snow later that night. She accepted their prediction with apathy. She couldn't care less.

It had been a long time since she had made a snowman or thrown a snowball.

Down by her stocking feet was a newspaper, a few days old. A headline said Nixon was going to pull troops from Vietnam.

"A cup of tea might be nice" she thought to herself.

Still, she sat, did not stir, did not follow her thought. "But why trouble myself?" Why indeed?

Eunice Kemper took another puff from her cigarette and slowly blew out the smoke. Through the cloud of smoke she made another quick glance at the phone.

She hadn't made up her mind if she really wanted to call or not. Nor did she really know what she might say if she did. What should she say if the thing rang. The old woman could be longwinded or reticent, she wasn't sure which of these she might be. She could also just let the thing ring itself back to silence.

Outside the world darkened and grew steadily colder. Both impinged on her window.

Inside, no light shone, no light had been turned on as of yet. So there sat the old woman in silence while darkness enveloped her.

After a few moments she took one last glance at the phone and one last puff from her cigarette. She watched the smoke make blue curls in front of her as she stubbed out her cigarette in an amber glass ashtray next to her.

It had been a long day and she was tired. Life had not been very kind to her, but she tried to accept it for what it was. She did not complain, nor did she wallow in self-pity. For a time she continued to stare into the darkness of her little room, trying to accept an inevitability that she didn't quite understand. Her mind seemed to grow blank. Her eyes closed as she began to doze off.

Momentarily the front doors of the lobby were opened and a gust a cold wind blew in, followed by a big bang when the door slammed shut. A great amount of loud, unabashed laughter boomed and along with it someone began to howl, imitating a wolf howling at the moon. This brought more laughter and then another howl and then two or three more in unison and more laughter.

'Bastards' thought the old woman. It would do no good for her to complain. The landlord

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was only interested in receiving the check. And as long as the rent was paid and things weren't getting broken, he couldn't have cared less. Everything was fine. He referred to her as the 'old biddy of the building'.

Eunice Kemper held her breath as she heard a herd of young men running up the stairs all trying to outdo the others in making noise. She called them 'those beatkniks!'

Her heart began to race when she heard them quiet down and sensed that they were outside her door. She held her breath and unconsciously clenched her fists. She waited.

As she waited, her mind began playing thoughts of what might happen. She thought that there might be a pounding at her door and she would refuse to answer. She'd show them. The one, probably the one who reminded her of one of those hoodlums she saw on those variety shows (with their long hair and bellbottom jeans and all that noise they made) would yell from outside the door and ask her for some beer and she'd tell him where to go. Of course he would just laugh and then say some smart-ass thing like 'then how 'bout a little compassion?' and she'd say 'not with the likes of you and get out of here or I'll call the police!'

Both her mind and heart raced.. She waited for what seemed an eternity, but not one of the boys said anything. After a while she could hear them make their way down the hall. She still waited. She felt cold. She looked at the ribbon of light leaking through from beneath her door. The hallway was empty of sound. The noise from earlier had vanished, except in her memory. She could barely make out the outline of the phone. It was too dark to see, but she knew it was there and she knew, she knew it still hadn't rung.

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