

Four

August 4, 2020

Jimmy ran into the Pepto-pink house where Edward and Diana were discussing the medicinal saplings she'd brought back from the Amazon.

"I found him! I found him!"

They paused their conversation to focus their attention on the overly excited Jimmy, who had been tasked with locating Marco, the missing participant of their discussion.

"They're fighting!" Jimmy announced out of breath, hunching over to catch it before erecting himself once more.

Diana's eyes narrowed and her lips pursed, but she didn't react otherwise.

Rivulets of sweat had soaked and matted Jimmy's red hair to his forehead, making him look as if he'd just walked out of the shower. Catching his breath, his blue eyes bounced wildly between the two people before him, wondering why they weren't more animated. Determined to get a satisfactory response, he balled his meager fists and thrust them into the air, waiving his skinny arms about as he shouted, "Marco and Steven are fighting...with their fists!"

Edward closed his eyes and dropped his head wondering how Marco could have found out. Of course, it had only been a matter of time. Extramarital affairs usually have a way of coming out.

It had been a late morning, after a long night of work that Edward had inadvertently stumbled onto them. He had been taking inventory when he heard murmurs and whispers emanating from the basement of the pot house. The audible trail ultimately led him to Yesenia and Steven who had tucked themselves away in the corner and were already half undressed.

Edward turned to Diana, who didn't seem surprised by any of it, and asked her to wait while he ran out behind Jimmy to sort things out. When he got to them, they were holding each other in a headlock, throwing worn-out punches with little impact at one another. It was almost comical to watch.

Giving Moose and Mildred the stink eye for not taking action, Edward grudgingly stepped in and pulled the men apart. It wasn't easy. Marco was small but fast, and he had Edward going round and round, as he clung to Steven, trying to pull him down.

"What happened?" Edward demanded to know as he struggled to pull Steven's arms away from Marco.

The two aspiring, over-aged pugilists were clinging to each other, too exhausted to swing anymore.

The three, sweat dampened, winded men separated when Moose stepped in and took Marco in his iron clasp. For his part, Edward placed his arm over Steven's back as he was bent over, gasping for air.

“Not sure. We were working on trimming, like you said to do, when Marco stormed in and took Steven out the front door by his shirt. From there the two just went at it, rolling around on the ground.” Moose turned his head so Edward could see his bruised jaw. “I tried to step in and stop the fight, but gave up when I took one in the jaw. After that, I figured it’s their stupid issue, whatever it is, not mine. There’s no need for me to get all beat up over it.”

Sometimes Edward wondered how different his life would be if he hadn’t lost his Hedge Fund Manager position to an artificially intelligent machine that quantified risk at lightning speed.

“He was sleeping with my wife!” Marco seethed, clearly directing his accusation at Steven.

“I love her!” Steven exclaimed unabashedly, before realizing he’d made the statement in the present tense, which wasn’t good if they were all to believe she had committed suicide.

Edward gave him an inquisitive look that took him off guard.

“She was my wife!” Marco whimpered, portraying himself as a shattered man.

Steven’s attention shifted from Edward to Marco.

“You know, you really should give up the victim roll, Marco. It doesn’t suit you. You’ve been unfaithful for several years.”

Steven received an unexpected dose of pleasure when he registered the surprise in Marco’s expression.

“Oh. Of course. You thought no one would ever find out about *your* indiscretions.” He shook his head and said, “You’re a

slime bucket. Yesenia was rightly fed up with your betrayals. No one can blame her for wanting something better.”

A murderous, jealous rage exploded within Marco at the thought of his wife’s body being touched by the pompous prick standing before him. He fought to wiggle free. All he wanted was one good opportunity to land one squarely in Steven’s crotch, but Moose tightened his grip around him and made him squeal from the forced decompression of his lungs.

“You’re an opportunist.” Moose hadn’t locked Marco’s forearm down with his embrace, so he used his limited freedom to vigorously waive an accusatory finger at his opponent. “You used my indiscretion to gain her trust and have your way with her! That is beyond low!” Again, he tried twisting and turning, but he made no progress in freeing himself. “You told her what she wanted to hear just so you could have your way with her, and now she’s dead. I hope you’re happy.”

“Fuck you, Marco. I didn’t have to say a word. You did it. She knew before we left to Brazil. She saw you in the shed with that widow...Ivan’s friend...Marta.” He shook his head with complete disgust. “Yesenia knows about...” He saw Edward flash him an intrigued look before he could correct himself. “She *knew* about your mistress’s pending bun in the oven and so did Frank. He killed himself because she asked him for a divorce!” Pushing Edward’s hands away, he took a few steps back and faced Marco once more, only this time there was resentment in his stern, accusing eyes. “Don’t bother lying to yourself. Yesenia

walked into that river because she preferred death over the humiliation of your betrayal.”

That last accusation had all the desired effects, triggering an emotional breakdown that pulled Marco down to his knees. Sobbing, he collapsed to the ground and sat there, with no one willing, nor wanting, to step forward and console him.

“She knew?” He asked himself. Then, he looked up to Steven, who had been with her just before she died and pleaded, “Please tell me she didn’t suffer.”

“Marco, you must really be delusional if you think that I’m going sit here and assuage your conscience. Of course, she suffered you miserable bastard!” He kicked a boot full of dirt towards the pathetic, defeated man and walked off into the night.

Jimmy was about to say something, but Edward instinctively reached back and took a fistful of his shirt, frightening him, but keeping him silent.

“Jimmy, don’t speak. Just go and get back to work. Show is over. Everyone back to work!”

He said it loud enough for Moose and Mildred to hear, then walked off in the direction Steven had gone.

“Wow! Wish I hadn’t just heard all that about you, Marco.” Mildred was unsympathetically looking down her nose at the sniveling man who was sitting on the floor wiping his tears. “I used to like you and now I just don’t.” She turned and strolled away, disgusted, wondering who the Marta chick was.

Moose didn't bother with Marco. The man was already about as low as he could get, so he joined Mildred and left him to console himself.

Edward found Steven sitting on the bed of Gary's truck with a Lazador homebrewed beer in hand. When he approached, Steven handed him his beer and fished for another.

"That guy is an asshole."

"Yeah, I gathered that." The two men sat in silence for several minutes before Edward spoke again. "So, does Gary know you're leaving?"

Edward caught Steven by surprise. How the hell could he know?

"What?" He shrugged and looked away. "What are you talking about? I'm not going anywhere."

Edward smiled at his friend and looked away, into the darkness beyond them.

"Come on, Steven. Since you've been back, you've been distant and uninterested in the progress of the nest. You're done. I can see it."

A warm breeze picked up and licked the sweat off their brow. He could see that Steven wanted to talk, but knowing Gary, he was probably not supposed to.

"Steven. I'm not talking to anyone about our conversation. I just want to know if I'm right."

Steven looked at his friend and shook his head at him, then marveled, "How'd you figure it out?"

“I pieced it together. If you’re as observant as I am, you can easily pierce holes through Diana’s version of events.” Settling himself further onto the truck’s bed, he continued. “Yesenia is one of the sweetest women I have ever known. I can see why you fell in love with her. Anyway, I just don’t see how she could have ever gotten the courage together to break into Diana’s locked office, jimmy her way into a padlocked cabinet, and still hold it together enough to commit suicide.” He shook his head and smiled. “None of that suits Yesenia’s personality. She would have fallen apart trying to get past Diana’s office door. That, and well, you’ve been unusually unwilling to hold a prolonged conversation about what happened over there. Couple that with the abnormally high amount of time you’ve been spending in Gary’s office on hush hush conversations, and well...there you have it.”

Steven gave Edward an impressed nod.

“You’re pretty observant. It also goes to show you how little Marco knows his own wife. Probably doesn’t even care that she’s gone.”

“I think Marco is more preoccupied with his bruised ego than his wife’s death.” He paused to clear his throat and spit before saying, “Frankly, I admire the woman. No way in hell I’d put up with Marco’s shenanigans for as long as she did.”

Steven finished his beer and flung the bottle into the ice chest then grabbed another one. He looked over at Edward, but the guy seemed to be nursing his.

“Gary knows. He didn’t like it at first. He was furious, but it seems to be working out for the best. I’m moving to the San Francisco within a couple of weeks. My field hasn’t yet become fully automated, so I should be able to get a job with a multinational.”

Edward was sorry to be losing such a great friend.

“Is she going to meet you there? Come on, we both know Yesenia never walked into that river.”

Steven bit his bottom lip. Edward was like a bloodhound on a scent.

“She’s pregnant, Edward. We didn’t mean for it to happen, but when it did, we knew that there was no way it would ever be okay for us to be here and be together. Not with testosterone overload Marco here.”

“How far along?”

“Three months.”

“Congratulations! Wonderful news!”

“Thanks.” Steven definitely thought so. “Our move will be beneficial to the future of the nest. Now Lazador will have someone on the inside...you know, to keep a pulse on things and keep you informed. Things are changing fast.”

Edward nodded again and asked, “And Yesenia’s boys?” He was going through a mental checklist.

“They’re young men and they need their father. They’ll stay here with Marco and his mistress, who I’m pretty sure has already moved in.”

Edward was chewing his way through the information when his friend gave him a big piece of fat to chew on.

“We’re having a boy. We’re calling him Izaiah, after my father.”