

## Coffee If Sad

by Ed Miracle

Why, on the evening she finally dumped Barry-the-flake, had Sharon returned to the jazz club where they first met? So far, it was a two margarita mystery.

Players and wannabes outnumbered the fans tonight, none of whom paid her any mind. Until the second set, when a silver-haired hustler brushed past her arm and laid a calling card in her hand. Embossed on fine stock, it said, “Tea if UR happy? Coffee if sad? Txt 313-2850.”

The bastard should be ashamed, hitting on a woman who might be hurting. If she wanted some Viagra-powered Lothario to darken her mood, it wouldn't be that dork. She texted DROP DEAD, keyed his number, and ordered a refill.

Across the room, Lothario got the message. And thumbed a reply.

*No, no. It's not a conversation, Stork Neck.*

Sharon scarfed the incoming margarita, paid her tab, and grabbed her purse. Half-way to the car, her phone chimed. She clambered into her Toyota and locked the doors, but the Smart Key, having detected a wobble in her gait, refused to start the engine. Her metal backup key, which bypassed the smart-aleck electronics, declined to reveal itself in her purse, and she was damned if she would call Barry, who still had the other one.

“So it's coffee?” her display inquired. “CU @ Bruno's in five. My treat.”

*Damn.* After midnight, Bruno's 24-hour Diner made practical sense, if no other. So Sharon swallowed a cold slug of pride and headed there, to keep warm until her cheeky car decided she was sober enough to drive.

Alone in a booth, Lothario smiled too brightly and offered the available seat.

“How dare you hit on a woman who doesn't want to meet you.”

“Yeah, Bingo sucks, too. Sorry about your sad.”

“I'm not freaking sad!”

“I just wanted to please you, Miss, that's all. A little song, a little dance. On your terms, of course.” Again, he offered the seat. “It's these new painkillers, you see. Some nights I can hear the tumors digesting my spleen, but I feel pretty good.” He patted his flat stomach. “Which is why I drink tea and hope for one good woman—before I cash out.” He laid a white capsule on the table. “My universal get-out-of-everything card: potassium cyanide.”

“That's your pitch? A quick date before offing yourself? Pathetic does not begin—”

A waitress interrupted them, bearing that perky Bruno's slogan on her apron: *Tea if You're Happy, Coffee if Sad*. “What'll it be, Ma'am?”

Sharon blinked. She snatched the white pill and swallowed it. To win, of course. To crush Barry. To extinguish Lothario. And to diss that snotty, back-stabbing car.

“I win,” she said.

Lothario spilled his tea.

“It's sugar,” he said, “just a sugar pill, Miss. I 'm sorry. I didn't mean . . . . Oh, dear.”

Sharon wilted into the booth and propped herself on the brittle shards of her elbows.

“Coffee,” she said. “Very hot, very black.”