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## Pourciau: First Cup

### FIRST CUP

Glen Pourciau

My husband keeps himself from me and I don't know what he's keeping. But sometimes I see a look in his eye, something dark, something that fears I'll find it.

When he goes out of town on business or after he goes to work, I often sit in the chair in his study. His study is a wreck, stacks of papers all over his desk and the floor, his bookshelves stuffed and in disarray. He doesn't want me touching his things or to come home and find that I've sorted it all out. In the bedroom, he doesn't want me organizing his drawers. He doesn't want them to be like mine, in other words. His territory, his world. My territory, my world. That's the arrangement as far as he's concerned. And to him, it includes whatever's inside his mind.

I don't accept this arrangement. When he's not at home I go through his things, searching for him. I've looked through every page in every stack on his desk and on his floor. The stacks extend to the walls, interrupted only by furniture, but they tell me nothing revealing about him. I've taken everything out of the closet in his study and gone through it, all the old records and the limited cache of photos from his past. No diary, no journals, no letters or cards from friends or relatives. I've looked behind the rows of books in his bookcases and taken the books from the shelves one by one and fanned the pages. No notes, no photos, no business cards. I've looked under the furniture and in back of the bookcases, through all of his drawers and under them to see if anything is taped there. No suspicious objects, no unidentified keys.

He sometimes mutters in his sleep. The night he got back from his last trip, he went to bed exhausted. In the middle of the night I heard him. He may have said, "I didn't kill her." I'm sure of the first two words and the fourth word, but not of the third word. He could have said, "I didn't kiss her." He may have

been talking about something far in his past. But why would he say he didn't kiss her? Who would care? He could have said, "I didn't miss her." I leaned toward him and asked what he said, whispering the words in his ear. He curled up tight in the covers and closed his mouth.

I want to know what he does with his free time when he's out of town and what's inside him when he does it. I smell his clothes when he gets back, but they just smell like his clothes. No matchbooks or phone numbers in his pockets, no makeup smears on his shirts, no unusual stains on his underwear. He doesn't say much to me about his trips. Just a business trip, boring food, a movie in his room at night, and after that a little reading. I wonder.

I wonder who it was he didn't kill or kiss or miss. I wonder what he meant the night he said, "Don't leave." Was someone in a dream leaving him? "Who's leaving?" I whispered. His mouth moved, but he said nothing.

One night when he was away, I alphabetized his books by author. I pulled them all off the shelves and lined them up on the stacks of paper covering the floor and sorted them. I cleaned the dusty shelves and then put the books back.

After he returned from his trip I waited for him to comment on the change in his bookcases. But he didn't comment, and the longer he went without commenting the angrier I got. So I asked him if he'd noticed it. He claimed he didn't know that I'd alphabetized his books, though he said he had noticed that they were out of order. I told him that his books weren't out of order, that I'd put them in order. He said they weren't in the order he'd put them in. He said he thought I knew that he didn't want me messing with his study.

"What's in there then?" I asked him. "Are you saying it's none of my business?"

"It's not what's in there, it's the way it's in there. It's in there the way I want it to be in there."

He headed that way to see what I'd done, and I pursued him.

In his study he looked over his bookshelves, up and down, back and forth, touching some of his books and shaking his head. I waited for him to ask me why I'd done it and if I'd been angry at him when I'd done it.

"What are you thinking?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"Don't tell me nothing."

He didn't say anything more about the books, but that night he had unsettling dreams. He jerked as if startled and mumbled, "What is she looking for?" or "Who is she looking for?" A little later he said, "Can't get her out." Then he sat up in bed suddenly and looked around in the dark. I wasn't sure if he was awake or if it was part of his dream.

"Did you hear something?" I asked.

"No."

"You were dreaming."

He rolled over, but it was some time before I could tell by his breathing that he was asleep.

The next day, while he was at work, I wrote questions to him and went in his study and buried them in the stacks, except one that I put on top of his desk. "Who am I looking for?" it said. He ignored the sheet on his desk and never said a word about the others.

Frustrated, I spent more time than usual in his study going through his stacks. I moved stacks around the room and left them, shuffled the papers in stacks and mixed pages from some stacks in with pages from others. I began to toss in my sleep and one night he woke me up and asked, "What can't you get out?" and "Who didn't you kill?" He asked if I was upset and what I'd been dreaming. He tried to comfort me. He held me, which didn't happen often.

As we read the newspaper that morning, I spoke to him while the coffee was brewing. He doesn't like to talk before he's had his first cup of coffee. Several times he'd suggested that it be a household rule that we not talk to each other before his first cup, but I'd refused to agree to the first-cup requirement.

"Did you get the note?"

"What note?"

I could see that look in his eye.

"The one I left on your desk."

"I didn't know how to answer it."

"You. I'm looking for you."

"I'm right here."

"But inside."

"Right here."

"What I can't get out is you."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't get you out where I can see you and hear you."

"You had a bad night."

"Stop doing this."

"What?"

"Avoiding me."

"I'm right here in front of you. I'm not avoiding you."

"You're hiding."

"It's all you. You upset yourself. I'm not doing anything."

"You ignore me."

"The coffee's ready. I'll get it for us."

He got up and the subject was closed.

Why does he do this to me? What is he afraid of?

After he leaves, I go to his study and sit in his chair and think of him sipping from his first cup. The room seems resistant, unyielding, and looking around, I see what I will do. In the back of my mind I hear noise, the sound of him roaring as he comes toward me. I will burn his papers, all of them. When he comes home, his floor will be clear, his drawers and his closet will be empty. He'll have to show himself. If he doesn't, his books will be next. I'll smash through his walls and flush him out, wherever he's hiding.

He can't stop me.