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“Teo Torriatte”

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*This piece is also available in its entirety on my website (<http://serialdistractions.wordpress.com>) under **Stories**.*

Floyd took a deep breath of cool autumn air, tinged with the bitter tang of smog that blew into the suburbs from the city. He didn't care. It was incense compared to the searing dust and blood-tainted winds of the desert battlefields he had endured for the past year. He gazed down at his pressed dress uniform which hung a little loosely on his tall frame due to the weight he lost while on mission. Jenny always smiled at him with smoldering eyes when she saw him in uniform and he didn't want to disappoint her. Grinning to himself, anticipating the reunion with his wife, he picked up his duffle and made his way up the street.

The Floyd residence fit cozily between several other cookie-cutter homes that ringed the small court at the end of the street. Jenny wanted their home to be unique, to be a neighborhood landmark, so she went to the local hardware store and bought them out of “Azure” house paint. She and Floyd had spent a weekend repainting their small house, covering themselves and some of the adjacent shrubbery in bright blue specks, and finally ended the project by making love in what Jenny termed “cerulean splendor”. As he approached, Floyd noted that the house was quiet and that no lights were on inside. Jenny's little yellow hatchback hunched in the driveway next to Floyd's old farm truck. *She must have turned in early*, he thought as he made his way to the front door and quietly let himself in.

Floyd set his duffle on the dining room table and trod softly toward the small bedroom in the back of the house. As he passed through the hall, light from the street lamps outside reflected off the glass of the framed photos hanging from the wall. He ran his fingers softly against the wood and glass that held his memories: portraits of himself in various uniforms, candid shots of he and Jenny on vacation in Manzanita, a certificate declaring that Floyd had completed basic jump training, the ‘official’ wedding portrait, as well as a variety of other pictures capturing the faces of the friends and family that shared in the joy that comprised Jenny and Michael Floyd's life.

The bedroom door was ajar—as usual. Jenny hated closed doors and opened the windows as much as possible. Nothing could contain her. This trait occasionally grated on Floyd's natural disposition

towards order and discipline, but also made him fall in love with her again and again. He gently pushed the door aside and gazed upon the form of his sleeping wife, bathed in moonlight, curled tightly against the body of a dark-haired man whose face was turned away from the window.

Floyd stood frozen in the dull lamp light. His mind churned against a rising wave of cold rage as he gazed at the sleeping form of the dark-haired man. A hot lance of insight shot up from his gut and cut through the anger and pain, an instinct that told him he did not want to know who lay beside his wife and to whom she was clinging like a life-line in her sleep. *Patrick. God, please don't let it be Pat. I don't think I can take that.* He pushed past the rage and foreboding that froze him in place and walked deliberately toward the sleeping forms.

The man was curled onto his side, facing away from the window. Jenny lay curled beside him, spooning his back, her hand draped over his shoulder. Their hands were clasped as they slept—just as he and Jenny often spent their nights. Floyd gulped down a sob and steeled himself to continue. As he approached, Floyd noticed the smell of sweat in the room, as well as the slightly fruity scent of Jenny's favorite shampoo. Grinding his teeth, he reached down and clasped the shoulder of the sleeping man.

The dark-haired man shivered as if a cold draft had tickled his skin and rolled to reach for the coverlet. Floyd cried out as pain, sharp and sudden, arced throughout his body like lightning shooting up through his feet and into his brain. Stumbling back, he saw the dark-haired man reach across the wide bed, the streetlight revealing his features. Floyd gasped in recognition as his eyes widened in horror. The dark-haired man, Michael Floyd, reached out and settled the coverlet over himself and Jenny's still-sleeping form.