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## A Change of Dream

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## A Change of Dream

The wheels of the chrome grocery cart screeched as it turned sharply around a display of pretzels in the center aisle of the crowded grocery store. Jane pushed the cart with quiet determination as she carefully maneuvered it past the old ladies who took hours comparing prices on one item, and the crying babies whose mothers apologetically quieted them down. She swung past the cranberry-relish display that prominently hinted of a Thanksgiving that would soon arrive, and was caught in a traffic jam near the frozen turkey cooler.

"Turkey, giblet gravy, mashed potatoes, and cranberry sauce," she mused. It was like singsong; objects that repeatedly fell together and formed a rhythm that mostly everyone followed. Not her, though. She wasn't going to fall in a rut, not able to dig herself out. She was twenty-six and single, and she loved it.

Independence to her was the best thing to happen since she had left home five hundred miles away. Here, she could come and go as she wished without having to account for anything with anyone. If she did feel a trifle lonely, there was always her friend Jack to stay for the night to get her mind off her insecurities. Jack was usually there when she needed him, although she didn't rely on him much because, as he stated once before, "you've got your life and I've got mine." After all, she didn't need a man to hang on. She was totally a whole person herself and could stand on her own feet. They never exchanged gifts because it was too corny and sentimental, and they generally vacillated between her apartment and his.

Jane maneuvered the cart past the turkey display and then promptly headed for the crowded checklanes. She scanned the other grocery carts laden with food for the holidays and family get-togethers, and then she glanced at the contents of her own cart. Three cans of soup, one quart of milk, two frozen dinners, and one carton of cigarettes. It was all she needed to exist on, really, because she dined frequently at restaurants, and the cigarettes helped keep her slim.

She tossed her sleek brown hair to the side as she reached for her grocery items in the cart when it finally came her time to check out. Outside the store, she hunted for her new sportscar, difficult to find in the parking lot overrun with cars of every size, shape, and color. She located the little foreign job that cost her so much money but gave her so much prestige, and then drove out to the freeway that would take her back home to her little apartment.

The freeway was heavily jammed in every lane, and it seemed to Jane that there must be thousands of people sitting here waiting to get home to their families. Jane had no one to go home to except her sterile white-walled box with green shag carpeting and a minimum of essentials in furniture. Normally she wasn't home a lot if she happened to be with Jack or at her job at the advertising agency that required so much time and effort. "There's just too many people," she said aloud to the empty echo of her ear. The words sounded funny to her, especially since she usually felt that anyone who talked to himself was either looney or lonely.

Feeling exceptionally tired with that kind of weariness that envelopes the body and makes sleep a welcome relief, Jane lay down on the fur sofa at her apartment and fell into an unconsciousness of oblivion.

The faded wallpaper and worn carpet were familiar objects of a past not long thought about as Jane stepped into sleep. The mantle clock ticked cheerily, and warm arms and kisses touched her from people who seemed like familiar strangers but weren't. It was those kisses that meant something to her. Warm and wet, harsh, chapped, and soft; they were an accumulation of everyone she knew and loved.

"Janie, Janie, why so long, so long,"? her mother murmured through a face misty and almost childlike in its pleading. Jane shrugged her shoulders and replied, "Independence, I guess."

Jane's younger sister Lucy crowded up to her and hugged her as only sisters could. She missed Lucy the most. Her kid sister was not a kid but very much a woman with a husband and a child. The baby cried a lot, but its voice added much to the good feeling of being crowded by humanity.

Everyone asked her questions about her job, her life, and what she did in the city, but Jane just laughed and said, "Later, there's plenty of time, I just want to look!" She looked, touched and identified with the objects and people around her.

Memories flooded her mind like a thousand pictures in a scrapbook, edges worn from turning the pages too much. The old graduation pictures on the buffet, worn arm rests on the chairs, the vases on the window ledge that were always in the same spot with a background of lace curtains to shadow them. The yellow linoleum floor of the kitchen and its homey smell of foods that fragranced the air all year. Outside, it was her father's workshop in the garage with many saws and wrenches, scattered in a hodge-podge to her, but it was orderly to him. He knew where everything was.

The nippy autumn air chilled her. She pulled her coat around her closer so that the warm she felt inside would not be lost to the outside elements.

"I just want to stay a little warmer before I go inside so I can just stand here and look at all this outdoor beauty," she thought.

"God, how can there be so much land around here? Just its own beauty. No practical purpose."

It was strange to see land not occupied by granite buildings, cement sidewalks or asphalt parking lots. No great masses of humanity crowding the freeways or the metropolitan areas, just people you knew and cared for.

Jane went back inside, just in time for Thanksgiving dinner. Her father said grace, and after that all dug in for their share of the feast. Arms were everywhere and conversation collided with the clatter of knives and forks. Jane answered the rapid fire of questions as best as she could, but it was awkward answering so many people at once.

"But Jane, don't you ever get lonely?"

Jane swallowed a lump of mashed potatoes that suddenly felt like wallpaper paste in her throat. Thoughts of men at work, men after work, the empty apartment and no close friends filled her head with empty pictures and an empty life.

"Oh, sure, I get lonely," she replied, "but my job keeps me happy and makes up for it."

The meal went smoothly after that last question, but Jane felt as though a little furnace in her body had just been stoked up and fuel was being added to the fire. She helped clean the table with her sisters while the men in the family retired to the den to watch the football game.

After the dishes were put away, Jane relaxed and listened to the easy chatter of the women, though she was lost in her own thoughts. So strange being around women and home again. It was a nice strangeness, a comforting strangeness.

It was that same comforting strangeness that enveloped her in her old bed that night. The room made her feel empty inside because she could not share it with anyone else, and she wondered if she would always feel half lonely and half independent. She felt that the two worlds she had just lived in were starting to merge into one and this might be the beginning of a new way of thinking and living.

The darkness merged with the half-lightness of late dusk as Jane awoke in a groggy state of having slept too soundly for so short a while. She sat up and shook her head as if to make herself realize that she wasn't at home. She was here in the city. The snow was lightly sprinkling the window ledge, and the traffic outside was a quiet hum.

She smiled to herself and tied the pleasant thoughts of her dream together in a big package with a silver bow, and picked up the telephone on the night stand.

/ Sue Johnson /