

Sissy

by Christopher Evans

When Paula opened the apartment door, Ryan was crouched just inside the threshold, looking surprised and unpleasantly so. He was trying to restrain a furiously barking dog—one arm wrapped around the dog’s neck, the other trying to encircle its cycling legs.

Ryan avoided the obvious. “Paula,” he said. “You look amazing and how was work today and why are you home so early?”

Paula told him that the fire alarm in the warehouse had been accidentally set off and that the whole building was evacuated to the parking lot. Rather than continue to make small talk with Lise from payroll and wait for the mess to be straightened out, she just faded away from the crowd and walked home. She asked Ryan what was going on.

“Well, it was supposed to be a surprise, so SURPRISE!”

Paula regarded the dog, still snarling and trying to free itself from Ryan’s grip. It was some sort of terrier-sized thing with patchy brown fur and long nails that clacked arrhythmically against the linoleum. Paula squatted down and extended the back of her hand towards the dog’s snapping mouth. It growled, then sniffed cautiously, then—deciding Paula was an ally—relaxed a little.