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Busybody
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BUSYBODY

Characters

Laura Stanyan, a military wife

Missy Johnson, a US Army Public Affairs representative

Sergeant George “Iron Man” Stanyan, Laura’s husband

Setting

The Stanyans’ kitchen, in a military housing unit in Ft. Sill, OK.

The present.

Set Elements

Table

Two chairs

Counter

Props

Tea Pot

Spoon

Tea Cup

Diorama

Duct tape

Safe Scissors

Rubber gloves

Trash can

Bag of cookies

NOTE: The character of LAURA often speaks incorrectly. These are not typos.

BUSYBODY

(SCENE: The Stanyans' kitchen, in a military housing unit in Ft. Sill, OK. MISSY enters tentatively. She is holding a small bag of cookies. Listens. LAURA bustles in from an adjoining bedroom, discards a pair of latex gloves in a wastebasket. LAURA locks eyes with MISSY.)

MISSY: Hi. Miz Stanyan! Laura.

(MISSY extends the bag of cookies.)

LAURA: What's this?

MISSY: I'm Missy Johnson, from upstairs.

LAURA: From upstairs?

MISSY: 12B. Just above. Remember, we spoke on the phone?

LAURA: Of course.

MISSY: I won't stay long; I only have a few minutes. I mean, I made some cookies.

LAURA: You're early.

MISSY: It's a bad habit.

LAURA: You live upstairs? But I've never seen you in the hall.

MISSY: I work irregular hours.

LAURA: You do shit work?

MISSY: What do you mean?

LAURA: Shift work, I said. You do shift work?

MISSY: I'm on call 24/7.

(LAURA takes the bag of cookies.)

LAURA: Yet you had time to bake these lovely cookies.

MISSY: Just being... I thought we should meet. Our children play together.

LAURA: How lovely. What's your company?

MISSY: Oh, I'm not with a company. I'm with Public Information.

LAURA: You don't say. Public Information. You mean, enforcing regulations on the grunts?

MISSY: Oh no. I'm a media liaison. I talk to the press, and the television reporters. I don't do law enforcement.

LAURA: You don't seem the type.

(Pause. MISSY begins to sit.)

MISSY: May I sit down?

LAURA: I thought you had to leave soon.

(MISSY stands.)

MISSY: Well, yes. I am. I do. I just wanted to meet you, now, briefly. Before your husband gets home.

LAURA: I see. You've been busy lately, I'll just bet. Media Liaison.

MISSY: Oh! It's been stressful, with, um, all the publicity about the injured recruits. And that Reilly boy.

LAURA: I can just imagine.

(MISSY sits gingerly at the table.)

MISSY: The news media has been very aggressive, of course.

LAURA: Disgusting.

MISSY: Yes. Well, that's their job, to report news.

LAURA: Not them. I mean the recruits. Lollygaggers. PTRP slackers.

MISSY: Oh! Well, after the Private Reilly ... incident, the Times called every hour. I was the liaison for that.

LAURA: Those prying reporters.

MISSY: Really, Miz Stanyan, they mean well. They just don't understand the military way of life.

LAURA: And that poor Sergeant Wilson, drummed out after decades of service.

MISSY: He did beat that boy to within --- well, beyond --- an inch of his life.

LAURA: I'm not getting your point.

MISSY: I mean, the reporters don't see the good side. The, um, decades of service, like you said. They see only the Army's mistakes, our slip-ups.

LAURA: Fucking busybodies.

MISSY: Oh!

LAURA: Not to be harsh.

MISSY: Oh, no.

LAURA: But it's simply none of their business, the civilians.

MISSY: They don't know the difficulty. In the Army community, what to do with these injured recruits. They can't be released. We have to have to deal with them, somehow, in an administrative way.

LAURA: And sometimes they keel over, and blood pours out of their nose and mouth.

MISSY: As you say. So. What I did... I calmly explained...to the New York Times... about the dead boy. And Sergeant Wilson.

LAURA: And about my husband.

MISSY: Of course the news media doesn't understand.

LAURA: They think of it as something for the frontal page. Nothing but a story.

MISSY: It's so funny you should say that.

LAURA: That it's a story?

MISSY: Yes! That's exactly how it is with me, too. If you say it's a story, you can keep from getting too wrought up, you know, or anxious, or frightened. If you think of what happens here at Fort Sill as a story.

LAURA: It's like a car wreck. You can't look away.

MISSY: Exactly! Last year I photographed a training exercise where a recruit was very badly burned. I disassociated myself from the actual... thing itself. It's easy to do when you have a camera lens to look through. Then everyone came to me, to tell them what happened.

(Pause.)

MISSY: He died.

LAURA: That must be handy. To cut yourself off.

MISSY: Oh, well, probably.

LAURA: "You have to break them down to build them up," you know. My husband's motto.

MISSY: I told them your husband...

LAURA: Is blameless. Did nothing wrong.

MISSY: Of course!

(LAURA smiles warmly.)

MISSY: Do you have some coffee?

LAURA: Sure.

MISSY: Great!

LAURA: I thought you didn't have much time.

MISSY: Just a quick cup. Before your husband gets home.

LAURA: Suit yourself.

(LAURA shrugs, goes to the counter, begins making instant tea. MISSY scans the table. There are a number of items, including a roll of duct tape, scissors, sugar cubes, and a shoebox, sealed up with duct tape).

MISSY: Oh, look! Is your girl making a diorama? So is mine! Sixth grade curriculum calls for a diorama every week, I think! What is it this time, Rome? The golden age of Greece? Really, if you ever need to borrow some white glue, come upstairs and knock.

(MISSY picks up the shoebox and turns it around in her hand. She means to peek into the peephole cut in one end.)

MISSY: Because this duct tape bulks it up, makes it look kind of lumpy . . . like there's some kind of a . . .

(MISSY looks inside, and lets out a sharp gasp. In one movement, LAURA reaches over and grabs the box out of her hand, puts it quickly on the counter, slaps down a cup in front of MISSY.)

LAURA: Here you go!

MISSY: Thank you. Did Candace make that . . .?

LAURA: I hope it's not too hot. I like it very hot. Almost scalding.

MISSY: That scene! Candace imagined, and cut out those . . . She used rubber, is that it? And nail polish? Miz Stanyan. Laura. I hope you'll understand when I say that I know why you're acting like this.

LAURA: Like what?

MISSY: Like you wish I wasn't here.

LAURA: Don't be stupid. I'm glad you've come.

MISSY: I imagine your husband doesn't like it when you have people over, and you're worried about that. About how he might react. I can appreciate that.

LAURA: You're awfully perceptive. Almost psychotic.

MISSY: Psychotic?

LAURA: Almost psychic, I said.

MISSY: That reaction is quite typical. It's very common among families where the husband is... I have referred several wives, over the past year, to a place that could help them. Right here on base, next to the PX. You can pretend to be shopping for your family, buying nutritious food. When you are really visiting the Army/Navy Advocate Liaison.

LAURA: The Army Navy Advocate Liaison? (*She begins to laugh*) "ANAL?"

MISSY: We pronounce the "r" in Army. "ArNAL." ("*ahrnal*") I just say the whole. All the words, like a phrase. It doesn't matter. They can help you.

LAURA: Tell me more.

MISSY: You're open to it? The people at ... the Army/Navy Advocate Liaison can help you. We military people need to count on each other.

LAURA: We have a common mission to defeat the enemy, is what you're saying.

MISSY: Yes! Just think about it, is all I ask.

(MISSY takes a sip of the tea, gasps)

MISSY: This isn't coffee!

LAURA: No. It's green tea.

MISSY: I asked for coffee. And you said yes.

LAURA: That's funny. We don't have any coffee.

MISSY: You don't? But you said "Sure".

LAURA: You must have imagined that.

MISSY: I'm not going to drink this. It's all grainy.

LAURA: It's instant.

MISSY: I understand it's instant, Laura, but it's . . . This is tea? It's not even dissolved.

LAURA: Green tea is good for you. It has oxymorons.

MISSY: Okay. I understand why you're acting unfriendly. It's not that you're really like this. It's because your family is under extreme duress. I completely get it. I have certain information.

LAURA: Really. Pubic Information?

MISSY: I'll have you know that my son Cubby came home crying today.

LAURA: Your Chubby? Was crying?

MISSY: It's not Chubby, it's Cubby!

LAURA: Maybe Chubby should go to ANAL.

MISSY: It's Cubby!

(SOUND CUE: Child crying offstage. The crying starts softly and gets louder, as the women raise their voices over it during the next overlapping exchange.)

MISSY: What's that?

LAURA: You should know better than to come in here whining about your little snot-nosed boy.

MISSY: What is that? Is that your daughter crying?

LAURA: My husband is busy every day protecting your sorry ass-

MISSY: -My "ass" is hardly being protected when my little boy . . . and your little girl . . . Is that her?

LAURA: -Sergeant Stanyan can't be bothered with tangential distractions.

MISSY: You're defending him? Of course, you would!

LAURA: My husband needs his quiet time! He is a very busy man! What makes you think you can come into our home-

MISSY: It's never quiet down here!

(SOUND CUE: Loud slap. Crying stops. Silence. MISSY and LAURA look at the door for a moment.)

LAURA: Yes. He's home.

MISSY: Is he in there with Candace? How is she?

(MISSY gestures to the diorama)

MISSY: Did she make that . . .

LAURA: My family is above approach!

MISSY: Laura, I recognize that your husband is-

LAURA: He's what? George is what?

MISSY: As a drill sergeant. I understand he's under a lot of pressure. I realize you may not want to say anything against him. About him. With him in the next room, I mean. I can come another day.

(MISSY rises. Over the next few lines, LAURA gets MISSY back into her chair.)

LAURA: No, you've got to stay. He won't come in here if you're in here.

MISSY: That's- He won't?

LAURA: No, he won't.

MISSY: I should go call, I think.

LAURA: Don't leave me here with him. I'm afraid. He'll put on his front if you're around.

MISSY: I don't know.

LAURA: I'll tell you stories. You won't even believe it. I need you to stay, Missy.

MISSY: Then you see it is my business. I need to know everything ... if I'm going to help you.

LAURA: We see eye to eye then. And you'll tell me what you know.

MISSY: Our children go to school together, did you know that?

LAURA: Yes, I knew that. Your child and my child are making these diarrheas.

MISSY: Dioramas!

LAURA: You mentioned your son was crying.

MISSY: That's right. Your daughter beat the ... beat up my son, my little Cubby. At recess. That's why he was crying.

LAURA: Really? When? What'd he do to her?