

The Argument.

By J. Ross Keverne.

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Nick dropped heavily into the sofa, snatched up the remote control and stabbed at the power button; nothing.

“What’s with this stupid..?” The question was out of his mouth almost before he realised.

“I turned it off at the wall.” Samantha’s voice called from the bedroom.

“Yeah well...” he paused, pushed himself to his feet; he could do without starting down this path again. “Never mind.” He added under his breath, knowing what was coming, as he reached behind the TV cabinet.

“It saves energy...”

“Yeah, Yeah.” Nick rolled his eyes, slumping down again as the television flicked into life.

He started rearranging himself on the sofa, tucking his legs up next him, was just getting comfortable when Samantha landed on him; one of his t-shirts pulled hastily on over her underwear.

“Oomph!” He exclaimed in mock pain. “Get off you fat cow.”

“Fat?” She wiggled around on his lap, smirking “That’s not what you said earlier.”

“Yeah well, you were on top of me, it would have been rude.” He shifted his hips, attempting to throw her off, all the while suppressing a smile.

A giggle, “I’m on top of you *now*.”

“That was... different.” He was unable to stop himself smiling this time.

“Yeah,” she signed loudly and jumped to her feet, “you were *much* more fun then.” Pouting she pranced off to the kitchen, her hips swinging.

Nick watched her, grinning and shaking his head at the same time “You could have put some clothes on.”

“Humph. I didn’t hear you complaining about *that* earlier either.” She swivelled on her heels and marched back into the bedroom. Sticking out her tongue and flicking her red hair at him as she passed.

Nick just continued shaking his head and rolled his eyes dramatically. Glancing down at the television, he caught what looked like a fairly bland melodrama. Absentmindedly he stabbed the power button. “Post?”

“How should I know? You *ordered* me to get dressed before I could check.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Nick padded across the kitchen floor in his bare feet and grabbed the handful of letters off the mat.

“You want to go out for lunch?” He glanced down at his haul, a mix of junk mail, credit card bills, and one professionally printed envelope addressed to *Miss Samantha L. Way*. Dumping the rest of the post on the windowsill he flipped the letter over and scanned the return address. It was from a large recruitment agency in the city - professional head-hunters.

“Letter here for you. Want me to open it?” Not that he was about to wait, they’d been expecting this for days now.

“What? Yeah, whatever...”

Nick torn open the envelope, tugged out the letter and began reading, his face breaking into a wider smile. “Dear Miss Way... blah, blah... We are disappointed that you have decided...” he trailed off; eyes growing wider as they progressed down the page.

Hurriedly he finished reading, started again. Half way through his second attempt he stopped, the smile gone. “What..?”

Clutching the letter he strode back into the lounge.

Samantha was curled up on the sofa, still wearing his t-shirt but having pulled on a pair of jeans. He stood in the doorway, stared at her, like she was some stranger who’d invaded their home.

“Let me guess, I’ve been selected for a prize...” Her expression changed when she saw his face. Her eyes flicked down to the letter. “Oh.”

“You turned it down?” His voiced sounded wrong, flat, unemotional.

“I turned it down,” she sighed, resigned to the argument they both knew was coming.

“We’d agreed to talk about it.”

“We did talk.”

“And you turned it down?” He waved the letter vaguely in her direction; it was becoming difficult to look at her directly.

“I turned it down.”

“Did it matter what I might want?” He took a few paces toward her.

“Maybe if you’d ever decide what you want-” Her green eyes fixed his.

“I didn’t get a chance. Did I? You’d already made up your mind.”

“Fine.” She sprung to her feet. “Fine, I’ll tell them I’ve changed my mind then? I’ll tell them I’ll take the job shall I?” She moved to snatch the letter from his hand.

He took a step back, out of reach. “You’re going to take it then?”

“Well, if that’s what you want-”

“I want to talk about it! I want to have a say in our future.” He was looking intently at the letter, turning it over in his hands, unable to maintain eye contact.

“Our future?!” She spat the words at him. “Our future, just so long as you never have to actually make a decision about it.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” His eyes came up slowly.

“Do you want me to take the fucking job or not? You talk about wanting me to pursue my career but you freak out when I try and ask your opinion.”

He stepped toward her, brandishing the letter “So you decided without me?”

“Either that or wait around for you to work out what you do want.”

“There, see,” he threw his hands up, “I knew it. You’d already made up your mind.” His arms dropped, defeated. “Doesn’t our future mean anything?”

She sighed. “I did this for us.” She reached out to take his hand.

He flinched away from her touch. “You did this for us?” He couldn’t stop himself, he started laughing. “You did whatever you wanted for us?”

Her hand snapped back, “Because you’re always too busy being a child to have a discussion about it. Maybe if you would actually make a fucking decision for once!”

“So now it’s *my* fault you didn’t even discuss it with me?!”

“Of course how could I be so stupid it can’t be your fault, it’s never been your fault before.” Such passion, such energy, it was so much a part of why he loved her, and yet it terrified him. One look, one word and she could make his heart glow or tear asunder.

“Sarcasm, very nice. You don’t want to talk so you make a joke. I guess that’s all I am to you a joke.” Stupid, petty, he knew it, but she’d hurt him.

“A bad one.” She turned away.

“So that’s it then? You’re going to take the job? Do you even want it? What about me?”

She started walking toward the bedroom, paused “What about you?”

“What about us?” His vision was blurring, he could feel the tears in his eyes.

“What about us?” She shook her head, his heart stopped.

“I thought this could have been a new start. I thought you wanted this.”

“What about your job?” She didn’t even turn round.

“Fuck my job.” The tears were on his cheeks now, his heart racing.

This time she did turn around. “But; the promotion?”

“I’m not getting the promotion.” A pause, his shoulders slumped, the letter slipped from his fingers. “I lied.”

“You lied.” It was barely audible. “When did-?”

“A few weeks ago. I was-”

“A few weeks?” Her green eyes drilled right through him. “Why didn’t-?”

“I couldn’t tell you. How could I? You were so excited about your job interview; it was perfect for you; I thought you were certain to get it. I thought we’d talk about it after. Talk about moving away; a fresh start.” The words tumbled out, sentences colliding with each other.

“You lied.” She just stared at him.

“Sam-”

“You lied... You lied. To me. All the plans we made. I turned down the job for you. And you, what? You lied, you ‘couldn’t tell me’. You child, you useless fucking child.” She marched up to him, hair snapping over her shoulders with each step; so alive, so terrifying, so wonderful.

A foot shorter than Nick, she towered over him then, her eyes emerald fire. “We said we were going to be honest with each other; after what happened before. You promised. No secrets. You promised.” She pushed him, hard. “You fucking promised!”

“I didn’t... I don’t... You said you weren’t going to-” Why did she have to bring that up again? He’d made a mistake, and he was never going to forget it. It torn him up inside and she knew that, why open that wound again?

“Don’t you dare. Don’t you dare make this my fault. I was ready to give up my career for you. You... you liar.” She shoved him again.

“Sam... But you said you could-” He grabbed her hand, clasped it tight in both of his. Her fingers so small, so delicate, he felt an overwhelming urge to bring them to his lips, kiss them.

“Could what? Take the job? Just call them back and say ‘Sorry, big mix up, I didn’t mean to turn you down? Urgh...’” She yanked her hand away, stepped back.

“I don’t-” His fingers clutched at nothing.

“You don’t what? Don’t know what you want? Oh, big surprise. Can you actually think for yourself?”

“Sam-”

“You can’t can you? For once in your life, Nick, just tell me what you want.” Why did she have to make everything so difficult? She knows what I want, doesn’t she? She must know by now? He shouldn’t need to say it out loud.

He reached out to her, clutching her shoulders, moving up to touch her head, run his fingers through her hair.

“Nick, don’t.”

“Sam, I’m sorry. I screwed up I know... I-” He made to pull her towards him.

“No Nick.” She knocked his hand away. “You can’t just say that and think it makes everything alright again. You lied. To me. You broke your promise. To me. You...”

“I’m sorry, I won’t-”

“No!” She shoved him away. “You just say sorry every time. You don’t get it do you? Do you even know what you’re apologising for?”

“I broke my promise... I didn’t mean-”

“You lied, Nick! You lied! After everything that happened, after you said you wouldn’t. After you said never again-”

“I-”

“No,” She shook her head; there were tears in her eyes. “Just no.”

“But what...” Please not that.

“I want... I need... Just leave me-”

“Sam-” Again he reached out to her.

“No! Just go. Get out... I need... I need some time.”

“I-”

“Get out Nick!”

She turned her back on him.

* * *

He’d left then. Grabbed his keys and walked out. He couldn’t remember where he’d gone, what he’d done, only that it was evening when he returned and she wasn’t there.

One of their suitcases was missing, along with most of her clothes. There was still a few of her things scattered around, but she was gone. He knew it.

That had been over two hours ago. Sitting here ever since, staring out the window, he was terrified of turning around, of having to accept that he was alone, that everything was still and quiet and empty, instead of alive and loud and passionate.

Finally he moved. He'd not bothered to turn the lights on when he returned, and it was hard to make out more than just shapes now, he staggered into the bedroom. Stopped at his side of bed, stood gazing at the photo on the cabinet. The two of them, arms around each other, laughing; her fiery hair tangled into his dark brown mess. She always said she'd preferred it when he let it grow longer like that. That had been taken barely a week after they'd met. How long ago was that now? Two years, three?

He pulled his eyes away, down to his pillow. He reached underneath; it had been there since last night. It was nearly a week since he'd bought it, nearly a week of struggling to come to terms with what he'd done and what it would mean. Nearly a week of feeling at turns ecstatic and terrified, of trying to find the right time to say something. Not that he really knew what he would say.

He eased it open.

"Mrs Samantha Taylor..." his voice cracked as he said it. He snapped the box closed clutched it to his chest. "I love you Sam."

Stuffing the box into his pocket he strode out of the bedroom, through the lounge, the kitchen and out the front door.

He'd find her, he could do that. He'd make it up to her. Somehow, he'd make it up to her. He had to; he was going to spend the rest of his life with her.