

Joe Bear



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It was a slow night, not too many customers. She kept an eye on the bar because Ray could be a bit inattentive and she'd remind him when one of the drinkers wasn't drinking. Not too hard tonight, there was only one man at the bar.

He was there when she came on shift that afternoon and now it was close to closing. He had been drinking steadily but didn't seem too far gone. That in itself was a bit unusual for this neighbourhood. Although Ray would take care of telling him to leave, for some reason, maybe boredom, she wandered over.

He wasn't handsome, wasn't young, in fact, he wasn't much of anything she could see, but instead of telling him it was last call, she ordered her end of shift drink and another for him, and sat down beside him. Being the direct type, she said "You've been here all day, are you all right?"

"No problems" he said, "and thanks for the drink, I'll finish and go".

Something in the way he said it "do you have a place to go?"

What was she doing, she didn't pick up guys from the bar. Well not often, and he wasn't the sort she'd pick up if she did. "I don't" was all he said.

"What's your name? Mine is Jane, plain Jane I guess you'd say" And why the hell did she say that? Something about this guy was throwing her off balance. Not his clothing, it looked like he'd had it on for a couple of days, an old suit and an overcoat on the seat beside him. No, it wasn't the clothing, it was

something in the way he sat, and something in his voice maybe. He just seemed to be out of place.

"Joe" he said, "my name is Joe".

Simple enough she thought, "Hello Joe, whaddya know?" What the fuck she thought, I haven't been this tongue-tied since high school. Oh god, I'm going to take him home aren't I?

"Not much, not much at all, and that's the truth" It sounded like the truth. She looked at him again and asked "Do you have a place to stay Joe?"

"I don't know, I've been sitting here all day trying to figure that out. I don't really know if I've got someplace to go, or where I came from. I've got lots of cash on me but no ID. I know my name is Joe but I don't know my last name, I don't know much at all."

"Jesus, Joe, did you get into an accident or something?" And with that she reached out to feel his head. He didn't flinch back and so she checked for bumps and bruises but she found nothing at all. She felt down his neck to check for swelling but found nothing there either. Well that's not true, she found a lot of tension but that wasn't unexpected, he didn't know who he was or where he'd go and he'd been sitting on a bar stool all day.

What was unexpected was the amount of muscle she felt. She looked at him again and under that loose shirt she could now see that he was built. In fact he was what they used to call a "brick shithouse"

"You an athlete Joe?"

"Not that I can recall, but I feel pretty fit so maybe".

"Alright, you haven't eaten all day so let's get you fed and then you can stay at my place". There she'd said what she knew she was going to say. In fact, she was starting to get excited about taking this guy into her bed. It all comes down to sex with you doesn't it, she thought.

"Drink your beer and let's go. Ray I'm off, see you in a couple of days." Ray gave her a vague wave in reply.

They left the bar and walked about a block to Lee's place, her usual stop before going home. A Won Ton and a Pepsi usually took the taste of the bar out of her mouth. As they went in she saw Dave's eyes widen as he looked at Joe. Yeah, yeah she thought, not my usual lunch, I like them skinny and long haired, druggy musician types. But Dave didn't stop looking, and he seemed to have something to say, but he took their orders and went away. She ordered her soup but for Joe she ordered a big plate of rice and vegetables, figuring protein wasn't something Joe was in need of.

She followed Dave to the counter and said "What's up Dave, you seem to have something to say".

"Damned right I do, do you know what you've got there? That guy's trouble, did he tell you what he is?"

"What do you mean what he is?"

"He's trouble, get rid of him quick Jane, you could get hurt".

"I can take care of myself Dave, you know that"

"Suit yourself girl, but be damned careful" and with that Dave went into the back.

Back at the table Jane looked again at Joe but didn't see anything strange. "Joe are you Chinese?"

"What? Uh, I don't think so but I don't know, I told you I don't remember anything,"

Jane fell silent and looked at Joe closely, he didn't look Chinese but she couldn't see any reason Dave would think him trouble unless he was connected to the Triads or something. In this town it was more likely he was connected to the Italian mob, but they kept things very quiet, this was where the old Dons retired.

The food arrived with a suspicious look at Joe from Dave. As they ate, it was obvious Joe hadn't eaten for a while, his plate was empty quite quickly.

"You can stay at my place for tonight since you don't have anyplace to go" She was committed now, and it made her a bit nervous.

Her apartment wasn't far, just across the road actually, over the Asian market. As they went down the lane between buildings to get to the stairs, Joe's head swivelled from side to side, he looked into every shadow. "Something wrong?" Said Jane, Joe just shook his head and kept looking.

They climbed the outside stairs to the second floor and Jane unlocked the door. Inside she flipped on the lights to reveal a typical student dive, second hand furniture, second hand rugs and second hand light. It was good enough to sleep in, and it was cockroach free. Either that or they were more stealthy than any bugs Jane had lived with before.

The last thing Jane wanted was a drink, but she offered one to Joe, who declined with thanks. He looked around and saw a couple of chairs and a short couch. As he looked at her Jane said "I've got a bed in the next room". Joe nodded, his face neutral as he followed her into the bedroom. "Not the excited type" Jane thought.

She turned her back to him and started to undress, when she got down to her underwear she moved to the bathroom and as she passed Joe, his eyes followed her. "Not completely unexcited then" she thought.

As she came out, Joe was in his underwear and waiting to use the toilet. His body was everything she thought it might be when she saw it at the bar. He looked like a bear, and was almost as hairy. His legs looked like cement light-posts and his arms were almost as big. The thing is, his neck looked delicate

in comparison, but she'd had her hands on it, and knew it was bigger than most.

Jane handed him a new toothbrush and said "use the toothpaste on the sink" as he padded past. Padded was the right word, he moved like a bear. He had a kind of rolling gait, his whole body rocking from side to side and his shoulders swinging those big arms. Amazing, she found herself wanting to jump on him just to see what he would do.

What he did was turn around with a half smile and look at her.

When Joe came out of the bathroom Jane was naked and sitting on the edge of the bed. She rose when he got near the bed, and she dropped his underwear to the floor. He stepped out of them and she put her arms around him. She tried to put her arms around him, he was as big as he looked.

Joe responded with a hug of his own that was surprisingly careful. He knew his strength at least, if he didn't know his name.

Jane tipped her head up and he kissed her. He was good at it. Some guys figured they had to bruise your lips to prove they'd been there but his lips were soft and he let her move into him. He smelled like he'd been on the street for a couple of days but she didn't care. She moved into him.

In the end, she had to pull him onto the bed, he seemed happy to let her take the lead, something she didn't usually like but with the power she could feel in his body, she got wet just thinking about controlling that much potential damage. She had

to resist clawing him, not that it would bother him much she thought, but she didn't dare because he might respond in kind.

He was good, really good, and he did know his strength. He took her right to the edge of pain and backed off into pleasure and when she came for the third time, he joined her. She fell asleep on his shoulder, well, half across his chest more like, while he seemed happy to look at the ceiling.

Jane woke to the smell of pancakes and coffee. She got out of bed and ran for the bathroom, her bladder got a workout last night apparently. She felt bruised inside and out. When she got to the kitchen she found Joe busy at the stove.

"I was up early and so I thought I would cook, I hope you don't mind" he said

Jane smiled and looked around. Thick pancakes with raisins packed through them were on the frying pan, and there was coffee in a pot. "I've got a coffee maker in the cupboard, and where did you get the pancake mix?"

"I wasn't sure what was what, so I just did what I know how to do. Apparently I have cooked before, the pancakes are from scratch and coffee in a pot seems like the right way to do it, I looked at the coffee maker but I don't know how to use it".

"Joe, there's instructions on the maker, but you can't read can you? You are an interesting person for sure".

Breakfast was amazing, the pancakes were more like bread soaked in syrup and the coffee, despite the occasional grounds, was excellent. Jane didn't usually have much more than coffee and whatever stale cookie or doughnut she could find. She sat back and looked at Joe, he hadn't become any more handsome than he was last night, but his face was starting to grow on her. "I'm stuffed, I may need another nap" she said.

"Thanks for letting me stay here last night" said Joe, "maybe I should get going".

"Not a chance, you're a mystery that I want to solve Joe, so you stay right here for a while. I really am going to have a nap, why don't you join me". It wasn't a question and Joe followed her into the bedroom.

Later that morning Jane looked at Joe's clothing, neatly folded on a chair. She went to her closet and looked at the assortment of men's bits and pieces she had there. Somehow she had collected quite a lot, and some of it looked big enough for Joe. All of it was washed at least. She took an armful over to the bed and had Joe stand up while she held things up to him. Yes, some of it would fit well enough. "Here, put these on and I'll put your dirty things in the wash, they we'll go find you some clothing".

He dressed without fuss, seemingly happy to let her take the lead. There was a thrift shop around the corner and they went in to shop. Jane wasn't sure why, but she ended up with a whole wardrobe for Joe. Well, yes she did know why, she was really getting attached to this guy. Joe reached into his pocket but Jane said "leave your money, this is my treat, we don't know how long yours will have to last".

They took the bags and Jane decided they needed more coffee and a talk, so they headed to the nearest coffee shop. Settled in with a couple of cups, Jane asked "You have no idea who you are, aside from Joe, right." He nodded. "No idea where you came from, what you're doing here, where you're going?" He shook his head. "Any idea what you're going to do?" Another

head shake. "To the best of your knowledge, are you a criminal? Are you a homicidal maniac, do you leave the toilet seat up?" Joe grinned and shook his head once more.

"Right then, for the time being you can stay with me, I make decent money and despite your size you don't seem to eat a lot, so we can manage. Are you OK with that?"

"Are you sure?" Joe asked, with a puzzled frown, "that's very generous of you and I appreciate it".

"Yeah it's fine, we'll find things for you to do. I don't work again for a couple of days so we have time to think things through". Jane looked at him again and she could swear his face had changed, it had become more gentle, more thoughtful. She figured she had made a good choice.

They spent the afternoon wandering around town, and as they did Joe's head would swivel to look down every street and lane-way as they passed. His eyes never seemed to stop moving, more than if he was just taking in the sights. "What are you looking for" Jane asked finally.

"Nothing, I don't know, it just bothers me if I don't see everything that's around me"

"Well this town isn't very dangerous, we've got lots of cops who like it quiet. You can relax." But he didn't, he kept looking as if he expected trouble at any moment.

Jane shrugged and they continued their tour. They stopped at a Harvey's for burgers and window shopped and both of them were content just to be in each other's company.

As the evening came on, Jane got a phone call from Ray. "What's up?" She asked, he rarely called unless she was needed for an extra shift.

"You know that guy you left with last night?" Jane smiled at his not so delicate phrasing. "Well I can't find any of the money he was paying with, I mean I'm short what he drank".

Jane frowned and said "don't worry about it Ray, I'll sort it with you, you can take it out of my wages if you want"

"Is he with you?" Ray said, "look, I don't want you paying for him, bring him in tonight and we'll see about hiring him as a bouncer, he looks big enough and we could use another one, since Terry quit"

"Well nobody likes getting beaten up" laughed Jane, remembering poor little Terry who was supposedly a karate guy, but got beat on by his buddies. "I'll ask Joe and see what he says".

Joe was OK with the idea, "I just have to keep the place quiet and throw out the occasional drunk? I can probably do that."

"Good, now let me see the money in your pocket". Looking at it, Jane didn't see anything wrong with it, but on a hunch she said "give me this bill to keep in my pocket" as she counted the rest.

Later that evening she reached into her pocket and found nothing. Taking the money back from Joe she counted it and found the bill had somehow gone back into his pocket. "Did you take the money back from me?"

"No, why would I do that?" he said.

Jane left it, just another mystery she supposed. Money that boomeranged. "You're a spooky guy Joe". He gave her another lopsided grin.

They wandered over to the bar and talked with Ray. He looked Joe up and down and stuck out his hand. Ray wasn't a small man but he winced a little as Joe shook. "Look, Jane, I'll pay him under the table if that's OK, I can't hire someone without a name." Jane nodded and looked to see Joe examining the place. He prowled around looking into every corner and checked the toilets too, men's and women's, sticking his head in after knocking to make sure nobody was home.

"Looks like he'll do" said Ray, "He can start on your next shift".

Jane and Joe spent the next few days wandering around town and in bed. Jane couldn't believe the stamina of the guy, either walking or fucking he never got tired. It also seemed that he never slept. He would be awake when she dropped off, and if he wasn't awake and playing with her in the morning, he was cooking breakfast.

He cleaned up, too. Jane was in serious danger of falling in love, she decided. And why not, the guy had seemed a bit strange when she first saw him but he seemed to be growing on her, she looked forward to seeing his face, which, she would swear, changed just a little with each day. Maybe it was that she forgot, maybe his attitudes changed, but he never seemed to be the same person.

She decided she would at least teach him to read a bit, so she took down a couple of her easier books. He tried, but said the words seemed to swim, and he got a headache so they couldn't start. Thinking about what he said, Jane got a pair of reading glasses that had been left in the place by someone, and sure enough, suddenly the words appeared on the page.

And he could read. He was farsighted, something she would have expected in an older person, but the glasses fixed it and he spent hours reading her books, especially a coffee table book on mythology. That one he looked at several times.

Jane had given up wondering about his past. Joe didn't seem concerned, he was happy with how things were going, and Jane was coming to fear that if he had a family somewhere he'd be

gone. Still, it would be nice to have a last name at least. When she suggested they pick a name, Joe looked up from a book of indigenous history and said "You keep calling me a bear, how about Makwa, it's Ojibwa for bear".

"Joe Makwa, you know that seems perfect. Joe do you think you might be first nations?"

"Dunno" was all he said as he returned to his reading, and Jane let it drop.

Joe's first shift in the bar was almost eventful. He spent most of it sitting by the door on a stool, not quite acting as a doorman, but checking out everyone who came in. He was checked out in return, he was the sort of man you noticed. He scanned the bar like a pro, looking for trouble before it started and, as Ray commented to Jane later, he watched her like he was afraid she would disappear. He didn't stare but each time he scanned the room his eyes lingered just a bit. "He's in love with you Jane, just like every other guy in the place". Jane dropped her eyes and mumbled something about him being full of shit.

Later in the evening a couple of drunks at a corner table started to get sullen. They seemed to be working up to a fight with each other when Joe appeared. He didn't loom, like Ray would have expected, instead he dropped onto his haunches and spoke to them quietly. It was only a couple of sentences but the men looked at each other and grinned, then laughed and Joe wandered away.

"Jesus, what did you say to them" said Ray as Joe wandered by the bar.

"One of them thought the other one was trying to steal his girlfriend, so I suggested they both take her to bed tonight and give her a really good time".

"How the hell did you know that? You were the only one talking."

"I just felt that was it" said Joe, and walked away leaving Ray shaking his head.

After the shift Jane walked to Lee's with Joe. They ordered their usual and Dave had a good look at the both of them, shook his head and walked away. Jane could have sworn his eyes softened just before he turned away. "Maybe he's getting used to him" she thought.

That was their routine for the next few days, until the incident. A big fellow with a couple of scars on his face walked in and started drinking heavily. Ray nodded toward him and Joe kept him in sight. About an hour into this fellow's drinking, he grabbed Jane and tried to pull her onto his lap. Before she moved six inches, Joe was there and this guy was on the floor, arm dislocated and unconscious.

When the cops arrived, Ray told them that the guy had caused problems before, that he had grabbed a waitress and that the bouncer had done his job. The officer taking the statement looked down at the man being lifted onto a stretcher and raised his eyebrows. Ray said, "Look, our guy didn't rough him up, it was over in a couple of seconds".

"We know him" said the cop "I'm just surprised your bouncer didn't need more time to beat him, the guy loves fighting. I'm also surprised you didn't come over the bar with that velvet covered lead pipe of yours". Ray looked sheepish and nodded.

When it was all cleared up and cleaned up, Ray said to Jane "I didn't see him move, he was just there and if you ask me, I have no idea what he did, the guy had his hand on you and then

he was on the floor. Where the hell did Joe learn how to do that?"

"I'll ask, but you know it won't do any good"

Later, Jane did ask and as she expected, Joe didn't have a clue. Word seemed to get around and that was the last time anyone laid an uninvited hand on Jane in the bar.

The next time Jane had a string of days off, she asked Ray to let Joe off at the same time. He winked and changed the shifts. Jane decided they should get out of town for a while, so she rented a car and told Joe to pack a bag, they were going to the woods.

It wasn't exactly the woods, more of a cedar bush, and they stayed in a cabin owned by a friend of Jane. While they were there they lounged around the place, made love in front of the fire, and talked. Lots of walks in the bush kept them rosy cheeked and wide awake. There were no distractions and the two of them got closer than ever. Jane was thoroughly in love with Joe now, and he seemed to be in love with her. The time in the cabin seemed outside of time itself.

Funny though, Jane had never noticed as much wildlife around the place as on this visit. Not just the red squirrels cussing them out from the trees, but the beavers seemed to waddle up from the lake just to say hello. The coyotes howled closer than she'd heard them before, and a Fisher poked around in the wood shed.

"No Bears though" said Jane.

"Already one here" grinned Joe.

It was a glorious few days and Jane thought that maybe they ought to stay and squat in the place, her friend would be happy if she did so, he always said it was under-used, but Joe said that she was needed in the city with other people.

"What, there's a big need for another waitress?"

"There's a need for you" was all Joe said.

Back in Guelph things went along as usual for about a month. Joe made some friends, Dave seemed to be downright friendly now, and he was usually a grouch since most of his clientele were drunks. The men in the bar, while keeping their hands off, were just as attracted to Jane as usual, and Joe never seemed to notice the flirting.

Jane realized one day that she had had sex with Joe, and only Joe every night and most mornings since she first took him home. That didn't bother her, in fact she loved the idea.

Nothing lasts.

The pair was walking down Arthur street, just idling along, enjoying the air when, up from the river, and against all reason, a bear walked out in front of them. Jane screamed and turned to run but Joe clamped a hand on her arm, turned her around again and said "stay put".

To Jane's astonishment, Joe walked toward the bear, spread his arms and rocked his head back and forth. The bear stood up on its hind legs and did the same. Jane was frozen with fear, not, amazingly, because she feared for herself, but because she feared for this insane man she loved. He was going to fight a bear.

With a roar from the bear, one impossibly matched by Joe, they came together, heads weaving around each other, mouths open. Jane could see that Joe was much smaller, there was no way he could fight this thing, yet it didn't knock Joe over, even though

it should have. The bear lunged and bit Joe on the cheek, but his mouth closed a few inches from Joe's skin, as if he had bitten fur rather than skin.

It seemed like Joe was growing, his face changing, his nose and mouth seemed to be growing longer, looking more like the bear.

Yet his head was being thrown around as the bear bit down and shook.

Jane moved, she reached into her purse and pulled out the clasp knife one of her boyfriends had given her for protection. A wickedly sharp thing that locked open, and she locked it now. She circled so that she was behind the bear and moved in. Just as she was about to stab, Joe yelled "No Jane". He swung the bear around so he was between Jane and the bear, and at the same time his arm swept her away "You must not" he roared.

Jane had once ridden a bicycle into a security gate, she still bore a scar from where it had caught her in the ribs. Joe's arm was even more solid than that gate. She had never felt so much power, he had never touched her with anything but gentle kindness. This was not gentle and she stumbled well away from the two fighters.

The sudden shift seemed to off-balance the bear, and he had lost his grip on Joe's cheek, but they still hugged each other like wrestlers. Joe worked his way to the side of the bear and buried his head into its shoulder. He had his arms inside the bear's paws and now locked them around the neck, interlacing

his fingers. He pulled with his arms, biceps threatening to rip open his shirtsleeves, and he pushed with his head.

Slowly, slowly, the bear's head moved sideways. Joe grunted and strained and finally, with a sound like a shot, the bear's neck snapped.

Both Joe and the bear dropped to the ground. Joe to his knees and the bear in a lifeless heap. As Jane watched, the bear seemed to change shape, it became more man-like, then it looked like a coyote, then a feather and then it was gone.

Joe looked like Joe, and he was bleeding from his cheek and shoulders. Jane ran to him and ripped his shirt off to see the wounds. They were deep, but nothing seemed to be a problem, no spurting blood from ripped arteries. The cheek was a mess, and there would be a vicious scar but it would keep until they got home.

"Can you walk" Jane said and Joe nodded, using her shoulder to stand up. He leaned on her for about half a block and then straightened up. She looked at him and his cheek was healing right before her eyes.

By the time they had got home, he looked much the same as he always did, no need for stitches or bandages, but she pulled him into the shower anyway, washing off the blood and checking him over.

"I'm fine" murmured Joe, "I heal quickly. I thank you for trying to help me and I thank you for thinking of me first, that scene would have caused most people to panic."

“You were in trouble, you were hurt, what was I supposed to do” said Jane, her face crumbling at last into wild-eyed tears as she finally thought about what had happened.

Joe picked her up, walked out of the shower and put her into bed, holding her as the two of them soaked the sheets and she cried herself to sleep.

When she woke, Joe took her to the kitchen table and put the kettle on, then went back to the bedroom and changed the sheets. He made coffee and sat down quietly. He watched her circle the cup with her hands, drawing warmth and comfort between sips. She didn't look up until the coffee was gone and she shook her head at the offer of a refill.

“How do you feel?”

“Better for the coffee, it's starting to feel like a bad dream. Did it happen?” asked Jane.

“It did, let's go to bed and I'll explain it if you're ready”.

Jane nodded and they moved to the bedroom. Naked, Jane leaned into Joe's shoulder and was quiet for a long time. Eventually she shook her hair back and looked up at him. He gazed softly back, no sign of the murderous fierceness she'd seen there earlier. He waited for her to speak.

“Where did that thing come from and why was it after you?”

Joe shook his head “I can't tell you where it came from, but it wasn't after me”.

Jane looked at him for quite a while, searching his face for any sign of humour. “How do you know that, have you got your memory back?”

“It returned a couple weeks ago, I know who I am and why I’m here, and this is why”.

Again, Jane hesitated, “What was it and why was it here and why did you have to kill it, and I feel like I’m going crazy”.

“You’re not crazy, you’re more sane than most Jane, which is why I can say that it was here after you and I had to protect you”.

“Who the hell are you?” Jane asked very quietly.

“I’m just Joe Makwa, but I’m also Bear Clan.”

“You’re aboriginal?” Jane was frowning.

“No, I’m Bear Clan. Look, you will soon put all this under “strange dream” so just relax and listen. I am Bear Clan, which exists wherever people have looked at bears as spirits of the woods. That includes China, which is why Dave recognized me the first time he saw me. I’m Bear Clan in China, here in Canada, everywhere. I’m not entirely human Jane, although I’m as human as you are”.

Jane shut her mouth, then asked “what do you mean as human as I am?”

“Jane have you ever wondered why Ray says that every man in the bar falls in love with you? Have you ever wondered why a guy named Dave runs a Chinese dive named Lee’s and takes such good care of you? Dave is a Taoist monk and he’s looking out for you, just like I was”

“Stop, what do you mean you were? Joe what do you mean by that?”

“I was here to kill the abomination Jane, and now I have to go.”

“NO, no I love you and you love me, you can’t go”

“I can’t stay Jane, I love you with all my heart, but I am Bear Clan, I can’t stay with you, it would interfere with your being”.

Jane was stunned to think Joe was going to leave, she could say nothing at all.

“Jane let me explain it all. You are like me, you are Love. No listen, in the world there is one woman who is Love, and only one. Sort of like Venus and the other love goddesses but they are just stories, it’s you that is the real thing. This is why any man who meets you falls in love. You ARE Love. You are also human and are worth love for yourself. I’m immune to universal forces, being one myself, but I fell deeply in love with you, as yourself. Can you understand that?”

“OK I guess so but that’s all the more reason for you to stay isn’t it?”

“I can’t. Think about your life, up to me you collected men like some people collect beer mugs. None ever stayed, but every single one of them left you something, your apartment is full of things they left behind, even that knife in your purse was left by someone who loved you. This is the aspect of your

life that allows love to exist in the world. When you settle down with only one person, and you will, but not soon, then your influence of love on the world will narrow down to that person. And that person can't be me because it's not the time, and if I stayed with you there would be no more Bear Clan.

That's why the abomination came to kill you, when you die, your aspect passes to another and right now, there is no other, she hasn't been born yet and if you had died love would have gone out of the world." Joe continued in a much smaller voice "And if I stayed with you, love would pass from the world, it would only be you and I. I can't stay Jane, I want to, I'd do it in a heartbeat, but I can't let love go from the world."

"And this abomination you spoke of, what was it".

"A man with a twisted, shrivelled, soulless heart who wanted nothing but hatred and death. I had to stop him, especially since he took the aspect of Bear to try and kill you"

"The Coyote and the feather?"

"Read your indigenous history books Jane, Coyote and Raven are tricksters here in Canada, he used their powers, that's how I knew to be here. The tricksters are generally on the side of Mankind, they didn't appreciate their powers being abused."

Jane had just about lost it so Joe wrapped her tight in his arms and said "tonight is ours, let's not waste it".

That night Joe was not gentle and kind, he was rough and Jane knew she'd have bruises, and she wanted them. She accepted

what Joe had said and so she knew that in the morning he would be gone. She wanted to remember this last night for a long time. She was greedy for him.

At dawn Jane woke to feel Joe getting out of bed. "That's it?"

"Jane we have had an eternity together, remember you told me it felt like forever at the cabin? It really was, the world ended and was reborn twice while we were there. But it still wasn't enough time for me, maybe not for you either.

Don't worry, now that Dave knows I'm on your side, I will know if you need me, and in a few years, when the young Love is born, you may meet a rather ugly fellow with thick arms and legs and a hairy back. You may even find him attractive. For now though, close your eyes, don't watch me go, and know this moment that I love you more than anything else."

When Jane woke that morning she realized that Joe was gone, all his things were gone too, except that bracelet of his he always wore. It was big enough to wear as a choker, and so she did, and it made her feel better because she really did like him.

After her shift that night, she went to Lee's and almost ordered Joe's meal too. Dave put his hand on her shoulder and looked at her for a moment, until she shrugged and he wandered off to get her Won Ton and a Pepsi.

I am supposed to write about how all these characters are fictional, but Jane is not. I lived with Jane for a while and I, like any other man who was near her for ten minutes, was in love with her. For the rest, there was a Dave who ran Lee's Chinese in Guelph and it was me who used to go for Won Ton and a Pepsi when the bars closed down. The rest of it is fictional enough I suppose.

Kim Taylor, Dec 17, 2021