

Now You See It...

A short, short story by Christiaan Keaton

“Hey, you awake?”

“No...go back to sleep.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Something’s really bugging me.”

“We’ll talk about it in the morning.”

“It *is* morning.”

Rachel lifted an eyelid and peeked out at the digital alarm clock next to her side of the bed. It read 3:33 A.M. She shut her eye again firmly in protest and faintly breathed, “This is not morning...this is rude...borderline criminal even. Now, go back to sleep!”

Derrick wanted to close his eyes again and try, he really did. His body and mind were both more than exhausted and he had to get up at five to catch an early morning flight out of Kennedy. But every time he closed his eyes that image would appear and he just couldn’t...

“Please, Rache, please! I’m begging you, just please let me tell you what I saw. Maybe if I talk about it then I can like get the thought and this hideous picture of it out of my head.”

“What picture? What did you see?”

“That’s just it; I really can’t *describe* it real well. I’m not really sure what or even if...”

Now Rachel threw a hand across the bed up to Derrick’s still moving lips to silence him. She sat up. Her new Walther P99 sat neatly on top of the end table next to the digital alarm clock. It was fully loaded. Her brain *went there* for just a second; but then reality gradually crept in along with consciousness and she turned her head toward Derrick who she now noticed was wet with perspiration and shaking a bit. There was just enough light coming into their bedroom from the hallway so that she could see his face now. Rachel Hoffner adjusted her vision and studied her husband’s face. He caught her eyes with his and tried at a smile. It came out crooked and half-hearted and that’s when Rachel knew something serious was happening inside of this normally “together” guy that she had been married to for more than a decade. Something serious and seriously wrong.

Derrick continued, “You see, I’m not sure if I had originally seen this *thing* in the park on my walk home last night or if I dreamt about it just a couple hours ago and now I think that it *is* what I saw in the park.”

“Huh?” Now Rachel was thoroughly confused, more so than Derrick, and she still was not fully awake. “Is this about that suspicious looking guy you saw in the park on the way home last night?”

“I need to calm down. I need to get myself together. Look at me – I’m a mess. I’m sweating, I’m shaking...this is just crazy!”

You can say that again, Rachel thought and turned in the opposite direction of her oddly behaving husband towards the end table and opened its small drawer. She took out the freshly rolled joint that she had made herself the night before and an orange Bic lighter next to it. Lieutenant Rachel M. Hoffner, United States Marine Corps, retired, fired up the hay butt that

was by the way legal, prescribed by her own physician, took a long, hard drag, and then passed it to her harried husband.

Derrick toked on the spliff for a bit longer than Rachel. He held the drag in for about fifteen seconds and let it out slowly. He felt his nerves abate and his head clear. He felt better. He glanced over at Rachel; her perfectly toned muscles, supple 38 C breasts, her unwrinkled thirty-eight year old pretty face and he remembered all the many reasons why he had to marry her, the greatest one however was not her sensational body or radiant smile and big, bright blue eyes. It was her sense of practicality. Rachel was above all else, sagacious, reasonable...the complete opposite of Derrick. Derrick was known to be cool and easy going, but not the most sensible guy in Manhattan. He was a lawyer who once worked as a civil-rights activist for the ACLU but now owned a hip-hop record label. This free-spirited couple who once believed in righting all the wrongs in this country, in the world, now joined the ranks of the trendy, Who's Who in NY society. They lived in the posh Dakota building on the Upper West Side next to Central Park where John Lennon lived and was killed once upon a time in the 1980's. When Derrick's recording company, 'Nuf Said took off Rachel retired from the Marine Corps and the couple had their first child, a boy, Rufus. Their son was two now and sound asleep in the bedroom across the hall. Neither Rachel nor Derrick wanted to chance waking the boy and so they kept their voices hushed.

"Thanks Rache, and not just for the herbal relief, but for hearing me out this early. I know you have that doctor's appointment this morning."

"Don't worry about it D...actually I'm more worried about you. I don't think I've seen you sweat so much since the first time you met my father." Rachel wiped at Derrick's forehead with her cotton pajama sleeve. An October wind howled outside and it reminded her that Halloween was less than a week away and that perhaps that has something to do with what Derrick saw. "Hey, you know that Halloween is this coming Saturday...could it have been a costume or mask that you saw?"

Derrick gave that some serious consideration. The problem was...

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"Derrick? Derrick...Derrick! Wake up, damn it! You made me get up...now you better...Derrick?" Rachel noticed that her husband didn't just fall back to sleep but that his eyes, still open, had rolled back and his head dropped backwards to the pillow, thrusting his neck forward! He looked like a freakin' corpse; just like the many hundreds she had seen in the war. She was pissed that he would just doze off to sleep like that after waking her the way he did, but she was more concerned, as any caring wife would be, that perhaps he was ill. As Rachel sat up more alertness settled in her brain then translated to her eyes and hands and she caught the blunt just in time before it rolled out from between Derrick's fingers and onto the bed sheets! Quick reflexes – one of her greatest assets.

Thoughts flooded in to Rachel Hoffner's mind as she dragged deep on the comforting Mary Jane. Her doctor had prescribed the pot for her appetite, nausea and vomiting, and some of the physical pain, but it also worked medicinal wonders for her mental anguish. She had seen a lot in her six years in Iraq & Afghanistan. Too much really. It had gotten to her. Rachel would joke that the war is what caused her brain cancer and that the Cannabis, what they told her in college

would kill good brain cells, is now what was going to grow her healthy cells back. Irony – everything is irony – and she loved it!

Her attitude was good, better than most, “Everyday is a gift. I could’ve died out there in that God forsaken desert! Instead, I’ll die at home, with my wonderful husband and son by my side, high as a freakin’ kite!” she told her doctor. He assured her though that so much research is being done every day and new treatments keep coming out, not to worry. But Rachel wasn’t worried about herself. She faced death, stared it fearlessly in the face, for years...it was Derrick and Rufus she worried about. She hated the thought of leaving them alone, all alone in this dark world to fend for themselves. You see, Rachel was a huge control freak. She liked the idea that all is well as long as she is around...with her gun in one hand and her Chronic in the other, she could handle anything. But not this...not what was now about to happen.

First came the deep growling sound. It started out low at first, like the grumblings of her black, German Shepherd, Ace...but it couldn’t be...Ace lived out at her parent’s house now in Connecticut. However, as the sound grew, Rachel realized to her horror that it was coming from under the sheets! Under or IN Derrick’s body! Then the shaking started. Her husband began going into a series of convulsions that looked like full-body seizures! His eyes were still rolled back and open, his neck still jarring out, even more now, and his head appeared as if someone were holding it back and down on the bed.

[I’ll post the rest on Wednesday, October 28!]