



Sanity

Penny Ash

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By
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Kevin lay on the couch for a moment, dazed, and more than a little confused. He didn't remember lying down for a nap. Last thing he knew, he was on his way to get groceries. Damn. He hoped one of the others had put everything up, he just hated spoiled milk and ruined meat.

He heard a noise. Hammering, it sounded like hammering. The scream of a power saw ripped across the lake and he jumped a panicked light in his eyes. The sound tore through his head over and over, until all he could do was roll on the floor moaning and holding his hands over his ears. Sweat beaded his face and his breath came in ragged gasps. He crawled to the end of the couch and used it to lever himself up to his knees. Using the coffee table for a crutch, he struggled shakily to his feet.

"Got to stop that noise," he thought, as he shuffled to the back door. Flinging it open, he saw trucks parked across the lake over at the old abandoned cabin. There were workmen scurrying around like hyperactive bees. He turned, stepping back inside and searching for his car keys, fumbling through the things on the small table beside the door. Finally remembering that he'd hung them on the hook by the phone, he grabbed them and ran to his car. He'd just drive over and see what was going on.

He suffered through nearly a week of screaming saws and pounding hammers before work had finally finished on the old cabin. He was pleased he had his quiet back. The shriek of the power saws had brought Mr. Martin out with plans to do some renovating on the cabin with his favorite lighter and a can of gas.

Kevin lay back on the old couch and was just dozing off when he heard a strange thumping bass sound, so deep it seemed to shake his bones. He sat up with a curse and a groan, running his hands through his hair. He listened for a minute, noticing the sound had changed. He could make out other instruments, drums, something bell-like, an orchestra, and a Spanish guitar.

"What the hell?" He got up and rummaged through the front closet until he found his old binoculars, then went to the window by the front door and peered out. Nothing.

"Must be the back," he muttered, and scuffed over to the window by the back door. It was just beginning to get dark and there were lights on in the cabin. He looked through the binoculars and his mouth fell open. He let go of the glasses to rub his eyes in disbelief, and they fell, smacking him hard in the chest.

A puzzled look floated across his face and he grabbed the binoculars again, and leaned leaning forward to trying to get a clearer view. "I can't be seeing this," he said out loud.

"*Pretty hot huh, Kevin old buddy?*" a voice said in his ear. He flicked fingers in

annoyance, trying to shoo away the interruption.

“Whoa,” he said, leaning further toward the window.

“*Let me see!*” The voice was like a mosquito in his ear.

“Shut up.” He stuck a finger in the offending ear and wiggled it.

“*Come on! Quit hogging the binoculars, you pig.*”

“Leave me alone.” He reached back, groping for a chair. He felt the wooden back under his hand, and pulled the chair across to the sink, all without taking his eyes from the eye pieces giving him this...intriguing...view. He clambered onto the chair and knelt there, leaning across the sink to rest his elbows on the kitchen windowsill, unconsciously moving his foot to the beat of the music coming from across the water.

“Well now, don’t that make a pretty picture?” Mr. Martin said, in his soft Texas drawl.

“*He’s not listening, the pig. And he won’t let me look,*” the second voice, a shadow voice, said in a tone of deep disgust.

Mr. Martin just gave a quiet, evil laugh.

Suddenly Kevin jumped off the chair, letting the binoculars drop to his chest as he ran for the stairs, hurrying to get to the lap top before he lost the scene in his mind’s eye. The music stopped and the sound of feverish typing filled the quiet cabin until late into the night. It was three a.m. when Kevin finally sat back to read what he’d written, blissfully unaware of the others reading over his shoulder.

“The swirling motion of her hips, moving to the music, drove all reason from him. He reached out to feel the soft silk of her skin, his lust a white hot flame...” Kevin raised his eyebrows and read on.

“He pinned her to the wall and...” Kevin swallowed hard, his finger hovering over the page advance key.

“Damn, boy,” Mr. Martin said when he didn’t click to the next page after several minutes. “Turn the page.”

“I didn’t write this, I couldn’t have written this!” Kevin was aghast at what he was reading. “You wrote this didn’t you?” He yelled at Mr. Martin.

Mr. Martin just chuckled, “Oh no, you wrote this fine piece of literature all by yourself, boy, no help from me.”

“Fine piece of...its *smut!*” Kevin shouted.

“*Oh yeah, turn the page, Kev-boy.*”

“No! I’m going to delete this!” He reached for the delete key.

“*Stop him, dammit!*” the shadow voice yelled.

Mr. Martin grabbed for Kevin’s hand and the shadowy figure in front of him pushed the laptop out of reach, catching the sleeve of his sweater on the pencil cup and overturning it. They wrestled for control and the chair tipped backward, knocking them all to the floor. It went quiet and a few seconds later Kevin stood up, straightened his glasses and shrugged his shoulders. He picked the chair back up and sat down. He pulled the laptop back toward himself and, grinning, began to type once more.

Several hours later Kevin woke up, his head on his desk and his laptop screen dark. He rubbed his eyes and hit the wake button. His word processor program started up and he opened the most recent file. He frowned, and then remembered the fight he’d had with the others. He dropped his head to the desk with a thud and groaned, his face flaming with embarrassment. “I don’t fucking believe this. One of me is writing smut about the neighbor across the lake,” he muttered.

"We didn't write it, you did. We just won't let you delete it," the shadow voice whispered in his ear.

"Pretty hot stuff boy, didn't know you had it in you," Mr. Martin said with a smirk.

"Damn! Shut up and leave me alone! We had a deal!" Kevin snapped, getting up and walking down the stairs to the kitchen.

He opened the refrigerator and took out a soda, wiping the top off on a threadbare kitchen towel before he opened it. He sat down at the kitchen table and took a drink. Once more he heard the beat from across the lake, but this time he simply sat there, totally indifferent, refusing to get up and go to the window with the binoculars again. The others stood it for about two minutes, before they jerked him up out of the chair and shoved the binoculars to his eyes as they pushed him to the window.

All of them sighed when the woman moved in front of the big picture window again. Their mouths went dry and their palms got sweaty as they watched her moving with the music. They all agreed that she had the most beautiful hair they'd ever seen, it was brown streaked with blond, and her skin was pale. "What is a woman like that doing way out here in the boonies,?" Kevin mumbled.

"I don't care as long as she keeps doing it, and I get to watch," Mr. Martin drawled slowly.

"Oh yeah," the shadow added.

"You two are disgusting," Kevin said.

"Hey, those last six pages didn't come from us buddy, you're the perv here."

For the next week he spent every afternoon in front of the kitchen window with the binoculars glued to his eyes, and every night until about three or four a.m. writing. It became quite a ritual, getting himself a soda and sipping on it while he watched the woman dance, and then munching on chips while he wrote, with the others making suggestions and kibitzing from the sidelines.

Then one day the music didn't start. They sat there for several minutes, unsure quite what to do.

"Maybe the clocks are all wrong?" the shadow ventured.

"Don't be any stupider than you look," Mr. Martin hissed.

"Both of you shut up!" Kevin yelled. They sat there for another couple of minutes then jumped up and ran around the house, checking all the clocks.

Kevin went to the couch and laid down not knowing what else to do. He was just about to close his eyes when there was a knock on the front door. His eyes flew open and he jumped up, falling off the couch. He scrambled to his feet, stubbing his toe on the coffee table leg as he tried to get to the door. He limped over and jerked the door open to find the dancing woman standing there with her back to him.

He opened the door and she turned, smiling, "Hi," she said in a slightly accented voice. Kevin moved his mouth, but no sound came out.

"Merciful heavens look at her eyes," Mr. Martin muttered. The shadow rolled his eyes and took over.

"Um, hi! Can I help you?" he said and smiled.

"Well, yes, that's why I came over. My current has stopped and I don't know how to make it start again. Do you know someone I could phone to come and inspect it?"

"Oh, I could do that for you, it's probably just a blown fuse. Happens all the time out here. Really," the shadow said. Kevin wanted to have kicked him for grinning like an idiot.

He nudged the shadow out of the way.

“Oh, that would be so nice.” Her eyes lit up.

“He stepped outside and pulled the door shut behind him.

“Lead the way,” he said, following her down the steps to her car, nearly falling when he missed the last step. He was too busy watching her walk to pay attention to where he put his own feet.

“*Real smooth, you lecher! Get your eyes off her ass,*” shadow said to him.

“Sandy sure didn’t walk like that,” Mr. Martin drawled.

“*Sandy didn’t have a body like that,*” shadow added with a distinctly lustful tone in his voice. Kevin rolled his eyes.

She waited for him by her car, smiling. The sun came out from behind a cloud and a beam of sunshine lit her up, making her hair shine. He smiled back and went around to the passenger side.

She drove him back to her house.

Once there, she led him inside, and when he heard the door click shut he twitched.

“I don’t bite,” she smiled at him, “unless it’s requested,” she added.

“Did she just say what I thought she said?” Mr. Martin asked in a pleased drawl.

“*Sounded like,*” shadow smirked.

“Well, damn, jump her boy,” Mr. Martin encouraged him.

Kevin ground his teeth and ignored them, following Elena to the kitchen pantry where the fuse box was. She watched while he looked at the breakers and snapped one back into place.

“Oh, you are so smart,” she said in an admiring voice.

“Please, sit, I will make for us some coffee,” she said, taking his hand and leading him to a plush red velvet sofa.

“Um, thanks, I don’t want to be a bother,” Kevin said.

“*Oh that was real romantic,*” shadow said, disgusted.

“How in the hell did you ever manage to even get someone like Sandy to marry you if that’s the only line you can come up with?” Mr. Martin threw his hands up in despair.

“Shut up and listen, you idiots!” Shadow yelled. They all looked at him, shocked.

Elena had put on some music with a Middle Eastern sound to it. The shadow and Kevin looked at each other wide-eyed. They hadn’t got it yet. A huge slow grin spread across Mr. Martin’s face.

“What, you hick?” Kevin asked, half afraid of the answer.

Mr. Martin’s grin got wider and he looked at the others, “I may be a hick, boy, but our Elena is a...”

“*Belly dancer!*” All three chorused with glee.

Kevin pinched the bridge of his nose and shook his head. “Oh fuck.”

“*I hope so,*” chuckled shadow wickedly, just as Elena came back from the kitchen carrying a tray with two mugs and a bottle of brandy on it.

Kevin sat there wide-eyed, his jaw on the floor. Somehow Elena had managed to make coffee, put on her music, and change into the sexiest red filmy bit of almost nothing he had ever seen, all in the space of five minutes. He watched, dumbstruck, as she made a swirling movement with her hips, and put the tray on the low coffee table. She looked into his eyes, and in one sinuous movement was around the table and sitting next to him. Right up against him in fact. He backed up as she leaned forward but there was no place to go.

Her lips lightly touched his in a soft butterfly kiss. “I have watched you watching me,”

she whispered, her lips against his. He felt a white hot flame blossom in his groin and gasped, his lips parting slightly. His arms rose of their own volition and his hands circled her waist. Slowly she leaned into the kiss, slipping her tongue into his mouth. He pulled her down and she lay on him, sliding her arms around and up under his shoulders. She moved her mouth from his lips to his throat, never leaving his skin. He responded with a low moan and pulled her closer.

She was soft and warm, and she followed the progress of her hands with her lips, leaving a trail of warm damp kisses over his shoulders and chest. Vaguely he wondered where his clothes had gone. He couldn't remember taking them off. She grazed a nipple with her teeth and suddenly he didn't care where his clothes were. He rolled over with her and pushed into her soft heat. She raised her hips and he slid deeper, moaning, a great feeling of comfort and safety washing through him. He began to move, and she moved with him, somehow knowing exactly what he liked. He moved harder and faster, losing himself in her body, his eyes closed and his face buried in her hair. He moaned her name as he reached his release, shuddering and finally collapsing on her. She raised her hand and trailed her fingers down his sweat-slicked spine and he groaned, feeling everything start again.

"Kevin," Mr. Martin said suddenly.

"Now is *not* the time, you stupid bastard!" Kevin groaned.

"*Uh, Kev-boy,*" the shadow said in a rather stunned voice.

"Nghhh!"

"Hey, fuck head! Look down!" Mr. Martin yelled in his ear.

Kevin's eyes shot open. He was lying face down on his old couch, which was now in desperate need of cleaning. He jerked upright and looked at his other selves. They stood there glaring at Elena. She giggled and waved her fingers at him.

"What?" He demanded, confused.

"You just had relations with your couch boy," Mr. Martin said, disgusted.

"But...You mean..." Kevin said, horrified.

"*Yep, she's one of us Kev-boy,*" his shadow self said.

"I so love to make a dramatic entrance," Elena giggled.