

## STRANGE NEW BEGINNINGS

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He awoke with an odd, coppery taste in his mouth. His tongue was thick and furry and he was thirsty. His stomach growled ravenously. His body ached as if he had run a 10K the day before and he felt as if he had not slept at all. What was going on?

Kyle tried to remember what he had been doing the night before that would make him feel this way. He remembered going to the party at Sam and Jill's but he had offered to be the designated driver for the evening and had drunk nothing but Dr. Pepper for the entire night. Had someone slipped him something in his drink? He had danced maybe eight or nine times with various women but he was in excellent shape for a 35 year old and it should not have affected him like this. Nothing he could remember doing could cause this feeling of total tiredness. Besides, he remembered dropping the last of his passengers off at around 11:30 and he had come right home and gone to bed. Hadn't he?

Reaching up to rub the sleep out of his eyes his hand brushed across his face. Instead of feeling just a day's growth of beard, as there should have been, he felt a full, robust patch of hair that he knew from experience would have taken him at least a month to grow.

Sitting up in surprise, he could see himself in the full-length mirror attached to the back of his bedroom door. He looked like ZZ Top! How could his beard have grown this much overnight? Glancing slightly to the side of his own reflection, he saw the reflection of another form lying beside him in the bed. Surprised, Kyle leaped out of bed dragging the top sheet along to cover his nakedness.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Hmmmmm, come back to bed silly, you know who I am."

The sleeping form languidly stretched her arms and slowly rolled over, exposing a breast to his view. What a breast! Her nightgown had slipped off one shoulder. Without the top sheet, the cool air of his bedroom had some interesting side effects on her exposed nipple.

Kyle stood there bewildered. He might have been tired last night, but if he had brought home someone this luscious, he was sure he would have remembered. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"Ugh, this might sound weird, but humor me. I really don't know who you are."

Sighing in frustration, she sat up. "Why do we always have to go through this Kyle?"

"Go through what?"

"This business where you wake up in a weird mood, then pretend that you don't know me. You know that I am your woman and have been living here with you for the last six years."

This was too weird! Maybe he had gone to a bar after dropping everyone off and gotten so shit-faced that he did not remember hooking up with this girl. On the other hand, maybe it was one of those Twilight Zone things and he went to sleep and woke up in a parallel universe,

another dimension, or some weird stuff like that. One thing he knew for sure was that if he had been living with this woman for six years he would remember. Glancing around the room, he began to smile.

“What’s so funny?”

The look on her face only added to his growing mirth. Now he knew what was going on. It was a trick. His woman indeed!

“All right guys, the joke’s over. You can come out now. Very funny.”

“Who are you talking to?”

“Cut the crap. Come on out Bill and Eddie! The joke is over.”

“Who are Bill and Eddie?”

“As if you don’t know. They are the two people who put you up to pulling this prank on me. Come on out you two!”

“What makes you think this is a prank?”

“Oh come on! For one thing, I feel really strange so they probably drugged me with something then set this whole thing up so they could sit back and laugh their asses off.” Kyle began trying to pull the fake beard off. However, it was not a fake. It hurt when he jerked on it!

The woman’s face began to scrunch up and she hung her head so he could no longer see her face.

“Add to that your ‘I am your woman’ stuff and it all makes sense.” This is the 90s—no one talks like that, especially women. This has to be a joke.”

Absently pulling on his beard, Kyle was still looking around for his two friends when he noticed that the woman’s shoulders were shaking and that little mewling noises were beginning to come from her. That was it for him. He hated to see a woman cry. Forgetting about the peculiarity of growing a full beard overnight, he rushed to her side.

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After calming her down and getting her to stop crying they both got dressed and went downstairs so they could talk in the kitchen over a cup of coffee. Although a quick search of the bedroom and the rest of the house had failed to turn up Bill and Eddie, Kyle was still half convinced that this had to be some kind of joke. The sense of oddness he had felt earlier continued to permeate everything around him. While searching the house he had the distinct impression that things were different from normal—it was his house, yet it wasn’t. It was almost like a movie set where you saw these elaborate rooms full of fancy furniture and expensive knick-knacks but they were all either cheap reproductions or empty shells. Things just weren’t *right* and he couldn’t put his finger on why. He was reminded of that comedy bit by Stephen Wright where he said something about his apartment being broken into and everything being replaced with exact duplicates. Things just did not feel right. Shaking his head, he turned to the woman sitting across the table from him.

“Let’s start over, OK? My name is Kyle, and I hate to admit it, and don’t start crying on me again, but I have no idea who you are.”

“This is strange for me too. How do you think I feel waking up next to the man I’ve spent the last seven years of my life with and he doesn’t even remember my name is Jennifer?”

“Jennifer. Now that is a pretty name. I’ve always liked the name . . .” There it was again! That sense of oddness plaguing him was tickling at his subconscious. Something had just happened that was not right. What was it?

Jennifer began talking to fill the silence his sudden introspection had left behind and Kyle desperately began to wrack his brains...

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