

From Badger by Don Zolidis

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1944. ROSE and BARBARA are co-workers at the Badger Ordnance Factory. Rose married young, and is in love with another man. Her husband, Matt, is in the army and has shown signs of being abusive. ROSE's husband has been captured in the war and is in a POW camp in Italy. They are at the factory, getting ready for a meeting.

ROSE, 18, a newlywed, nervous

BARBARA, 23, a young mother determined to earn her own money

ROSE starts getting out her coveralls.

BARBARA

You coming tonight?

ROSE

I said I would be. Got any word on um...?

BARBARA

John?

She shakes her head.

ROSE

Oh I'm sorry to hear that. I'm sure they'll rescue him soon. Italy's almost finished.

BARBARA

Thanks. How's your husband?

ROSE

He's in Australia. Just think about that – been in Wisconsin his whole life, and now he's on the other side of the world.

BARBARA

Yeah. Our dream honeymoon, if we had a million bucks, we were gonna go to Rome. Now I think he's had enough of Italy.

ROSE laughs a little.

ROSE

How do you do it?

BARBARA

What else am I gonna do? Cry all day? My worrying ain't gonna help him none.

ROSE

Right.

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Pause.

Do you love your husband?

BARBARA

Of course.

BARBARA takes in ROSE.

ROSE

I mean... how did you know? Okay, so, when me and Matt started dating I thought he was wonderful and – you know I was just getting to know him –

BARBARA

Right.

ROSE

And then he got drafted and... I mean we had only been dating for a couple of months –

BARBARA

Mm-hm.

ROSE

So – so maybe I had only seen one side of him, know what I mean? He was putting his best foot forward. And now...? Is your husband nice to you?

BARBARA

Yes.

ROSE tears up.

ROSE

Maybe I'm just being stupid/ and –

BARBARA

No – hey. You're not being stupid. I'm sure Matt is under a lot of pressure – all the men are – so that might make them act in certain ways that they might not normally act.

ROSE

Right.

BARBARA

But – John was always respectful, and he's always supported me. And he's kind to me. Because that's who he is, know what I'm saying? That's part of his bones. And I see some couples – I don't know anything about you and Matt – but I see some couples where the husband is not kind. And you deserve someone who's kind to you.

ROSE

Yeah.

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BARBARA

I know one thing: the war's not gonna make him better.

ROSE

So what do I do?

BARBARA

Is he cruel to you?

ROSE can't answer.

Has he hit you?

Pause.

ROSE

Not yet.

BARBARA

He drinks?

ROSE

It's probably my fault –

BARBARA

It's your fault that he drinks?

ROSE

I haven't always been a good wife, so when gets angry/ it's because I've fouled things up –

BARBARA

It's not your fault.

ROSE

But what if it is?

BARBARA

It's not.

ROSE

You know, at the dance I was dancing with another boy –

BARBARA

You can dance with other boys –

ROSE

And Matt heard about it –

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BARBARA

Rose. You didn't do anything wrong. Okay? You – didn't – do anything wrong. I saw you that night.

ROSE (*nodding*)

Okay.

BARBARA

Nobody has the right to be cruel to you. All right? Even if you mess up. And you're eighteen years old, you're gonna mess up a lot. For the life of me I don't understand why you got married so young.

ROSE

He asked me!

BARBARA

And?

ROSE

And what was I gonna say, no?

BARBARA

Yes!

ROSE

That would have crushed him!

BARBARA

What did you want?! You spend so much time worrying about what he wants, you never think about what you want! You *exist*, Rose. You have a right to exist. What do you want?

ROSE

I don't know.

BARBARA groans.

I don't. I...

BARBARA

In the deepest part of your heart, what do you want?

ROSE

I want... him not to come home.

Pause.

That's really awful, isn't it? But that's what I think about – and I know that makes me a horrible person but I... I kind of imagine what it would be like to see that black car pull up in front of my little house, and for them to tell me... 'we're so sorry, ma'am, but your husband was killed in combat...' That makes me just the worst, doesn't it? I hate myself sometimes and –

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BARBARA hugs her.

Hey. You're all right. You're human.

BARBARA

It's so ugly what goes on in my head –

ROSE

Shhh....

BARBARA

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