

“Love Songs are for Suckers”

By Gabe Wollenburg

Stan Fillipo rubbed his fingers together, hoping to knock the cheese crumbs from them. In his head, he knew that Rebecca had been gone only a few hours, but it felt like forever. It felt like days that he'd been sitting in his laptop chair, meandering away across the internets while flipping though the high cable channels. She'd left in a huff-- a

righteous huff. She'd packed up the dog, Little Billy, and a bag of her belongings and left without explaining anything. He fought his urge to chase after her, that was what he wanted to do, though. He knew from experience though that it didn't help. If he chased after her he'd just delay her return; making a scene outside in the parking lot would only escalate the situation.

She'd be home soon enough. She usually didn't stay away so long though. And she'd never taken the dog before. Stan plowed through a whole bag of O-ke-doke while he sulked in his laptop chair waiting for her.

She was really pissed. Really pissed. She had every right to be. He'd smoked four bowls-- four bowls!-- on his way home. Well, waiting to come home. Well, before he'd come home. Brian, his long-time high school buddy and apartment manager, kind of made him. Stan meant to go, but Brian kept packing 'em up, and that damn steam roller

that Brian had at the bar just kept the smoke rolling. Then the two had stumbled and bumbled their way home in a haze of giggles and goofiness.

When Stan got home it was 3 a.m. -- where did the night go?-- and Rebbecca was standing at the door waiting for him. He knew he was in trouble, just from the look on her face. She pushed past him through the apartment door, the little dog tucked under her arm. He stood and watched dumbly as the door closed and then the building door slammed behind her. He didn't turn to look but listened to the dog chirp worried little barks from under her arm as she trudged down the snowy alleyway to the parking lot outside their bedroom. Stan didn't move, still looking at the back of the apartment door as he listened to Rebecca's car turn over and rumble past the bedroom window. He'd been meaning to take the old Chrysler in for muffler work for weeks.

He stood by the door then, afraid to move and break the spell, clinging to the idea that he could somehow deny that any of this was happening. After a few minutes listening to the apartment building's creaky night sounds, his feet got tired.

He sat down in the chair next to his laptop, figuring he had to do something. He logged into the computer and toyed with the idea of sending a trace on her vehicle locator box, or calling some of his cop buddies and having her stopped and interrogated. He dismissed the Milwaukee PD dispatch remote browser that he'd impulsively launched and decided that not only would getting the cops involved aggravate the situation but would probably end up getting him fired from his cushy job as the dispatch sysadmin. No, there was no reason to call the cops. He instead clicked over to the internets and mindlessly browsed the news aggregators, trying to push back the rising sense of desperation welling in his

belly.

That was what seemed like hours ago. He'd since pounded through the entire bag of cheese popcorn and had watched half an infomercial on some kind of miracle mopping robot that reported detailed data on the filth found on your floor back to a central database. For \$45, the mop's makers could send you a report "with over 99% accuracy" about what sort of shit your family was pulling behind your back. Nobody trusted anybody, Stan lamented. The word was an unsafe place-- it really was.

What if Rebbecca was in an accident? She shouldn't be driving around upset after dark. It was dangerous. And the snow made it worse. He imagined her car flipped over, rolling down one of the hills along Lafayette Place. He'd seen that happen before. And she'd certainly take Lafayette Place from their apartment. A coyote or something could cut in front of her and then she'd go over the

edge. If she was lucky, she'd hit one of the benches or a stop sign and only end up with a serious injury. Usually, the cars that slid over that railing tumbled for a quarter of a mile down into the tennis courts at the bottom. She'd flip at least five times before she came to a rest and the police would find her body mangled and broken, covered in broken glass and blood streaming down her face., coming from a raw clump of meat and hair above her scalp line He saw Rebecca's face in his mind's eye, peppered with chunks of broken glass from the windshield and swollen from crying as she drove. He clicked up the dispatch application on his laptop again. the client loaded across his desktop. Stan stared at the dialog's crawling ellipsis that followed the loading screen as client made its network connections to the downtown police shop. Query... handshake... authentication...

His fingers were numbed with panic as he typed his ID into the launcher app. The dog

would have been thrown from the car who knows where and if they'd find the little guy. The Launcher app rejected his credentials. Wrong password. his fingers flashed out the password across his laptop keyboard again. Rejected. He must be typing it wrong, he thought. He took his hands off the laptop. He shouldn't be panicking anyway. She was fine. it was a serious breach of ethics for him to check the dispatch data stream for his own information. It was probably best that he didn't get his password out correctly.

His mind flashed to an image of Rebecca's blond curls rolling across an ambulance stretcher, dangling down and spilling across the edge like a broken telephone handset. He saw her, a linen draped from head to toe, Little Billy still tucked under her arm.

He was the only one who'd know if he was tapped into the data stream, his mind snapped back to the living room. He could just edit the logs in the morning and no one

would be the wiser. The PD would have to ask him to analyze it if they ever investigated anyway-- and besides, there were several journalists in the city who tapped the dispatch feed twenty-four seven using licitly obtained detective's codes. His fingers fluttered across the keyboard again, this time putting the pass code in correctly. The dispatch browser popped up and he quickly scrolled through the last few hours worth of reports. The usual gunshots, street violence, a few UFO sightings-- that was weird-- but no accidents. None that matched Rebecca's beat-up Chrysler, anyway. He pushed his palms into his eyes and leaned back into his chair.

He must have fallen asleep, although he swore he'd closed his eyes for only a moment, but little billy startled him by jumping into his lap and trailing along behind him was Rebbecca. She was still cross with him, her furrows told him as much.

“What the fuck?” she asked as she spotted the dispatch log rolling across his laptop.

“Are you fucking spying on me?”

He tried to blink the sleep from his eyes and then sheepishly realized it was cheese-scum from the O-ke-doke. “I was worried you were hurt.” he croaked.

“Nice.” she said. “Nice that you can fucking log in and spy on me. Why don't you just hack into my LoJack next time and bring the car home forcibly.”

“It's not like that,” he grumbled.

“Well, you can thank your fucking dog. He's the one who wouldn't let me leave.”

“I was worried, I thought you were hurt.”

“Now you fucking know.”

Stan tried to rub the crud from his eyes again. “Know what?”

“What it's fucking like to wait around wondering where the fuck you are.”

Stan ignored the pronoun trouble in Rebecca's statement. He knew what she meant. "I know."

"So you fucking just had your cop buddies spy on me?"

"No." he said. "No. It's not like that. I was just watching the dispatch stream. You know what?"

They caught one another looking into the others eyes for a moment.

"Never mind. You're right," he said. "You're right. I'm an ass. What do you want?"

"I want you to tell me when your fucking coming home! And then come fucking home when you tell me when you're fucking coming home."

"You could have just called me. My communicator was on."

"I shouldn't have to. You should just fucking come home at a reasonable time." She shouted. "And without the stench of

illicits on you," she added. "Jesus. You work for the fucking Police, remember?"

"Who do you think sold it to me?" he shouted back. They were going to have a big fight now, now he could feel it.

"Don't raise your voice at me."

"I'm not." he had. "I mean. I didn't want to."

His eye caught the dispatch logs flickering across the terminal.

"Look," he said.

She glared at him.

"Look. One of the neighbors just called us in," he said, quiet now.

"Seriously?"

The fight dissipated.

"Yeah." He leaned over the laptop and put a trace on the data stream.

"Can you see who it was?" she asked.

"Already looking..."

The data stream flowed in at real-time while the dispatcher processed the call. Stan had only logged into ASCII feed; it was the one that took up the least bandwidth. "It looks like ..." he said, trying to mentally recall the telephony id's from the network box in the apartment complex's router in the basement. The trace popped up across the screen before he could recall for himself.

"It's Brian."

"What?"

"It's fucking Brian. The logs say someone from his apartment called in a noise complaint. Domestic squabble, the dispatcher noted." Stan clicked away the trace and then put a dismissal script on the incident. The script would delete it from the cue before it got assigned. A low level noise complaint wasn't going to get sent straight out to the beat cops very quickly. Fuck it. Nobody would ask. He was saving the cops from coming out unnecessarily. The beat cop would probably

thank him if he knew.

“We so have to move,” she said.

“I know. I'm sorry.”

“Fuck your sorry,” she said. “Just don't do it again.”

He stood from his chair and grabbed her. She was short so he had to lean over to hug her properly. She hugged him back. He really was sorry. He sobbed into her shoulders. “I'm so sorry,” he sobbed; “so sorry.”

“You're getting cheese crud all over me,” she said.



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