

Midwest Life-Storm

By Sandy McCune Westin

Driving across Kansas is deadly dull. I'm tempted to count the eighteen wheelers, or maybe the RV's heading in the other direction on I-40 again – anything to fill the time while Jim drives us westward mile after mile.

Jim doesn't talk to me anymore, though I've no idea why. It started just a few months after our wedding last September. Oh, the little things get discussed, like when we needed to leave on this trip from Boulder to Kansas City, and how long our three teenaged boys – my two and his one – would be home on their own, a friend of the family checking in on them. Anything of more substance than that, though – not on the table.

The conference had taken up two of the four days. This 600 mile drive each way had taken the other two. I settle down for a nap, my pillow snug against the car window.

"You going to sleep?" Jim asks out of the blue.

"Mm-hmm," I murmur in response. But there's something in his tone that nudges me back into our shared small space.

"Why?" I ask. "Do you need something?"

"I thought maybe we could talk," he responds.

"Oh," I say, straightening up in my seat, startled into wakefulness that wasn't available just moments ago.

"OK, what's up?" I ask, opening the door to I know not what might come next.

"Umm..." he starts out hesitantly, "You've probably noticed I've been a bit withdrawn lately."

There's an understatement, I think to myself. For the past few months we've been more like roommates than newlyweds, in more ways than one. Keeping this to myself, I just respond with what I hope is a warm, encouraging tone.

"Well, yes. I've been a bit concerned. What's on your mind?"

"It's just that..." He pauses for a moment, as if poised on a high diving board. "I'd like you to move out. By next Saturday. You, and your boys too."

A bucket of ice water would have been less of a shock. "Move out? But we're married!" I want to cry out. Instead I manage to say with a quiet steadiness far from what I'm feeling, "You really mean that?"

"Yes," is his simple answer, pounded with the emphasis of a first nail into a coffin lid.

"You must have been thinking about this for quite awhile," I manage to say. I sound so reasonable, so sane, even to my own ears, though tears are beginning to quietly course down my face like a Midwest thunderstorm.

He then dumps out all his pent-up thoughts in a torrent of words. Something about not feeling we're good together as a family; that he hadn't figured on my two sons coming back from living with their father in California. (Well, I hadn't either, I think to myself, but such is life.)

The rest of his words are lost in a roaring that takes over inside my head. I will get through this; I will survive, I tell myself. I turn my face to the window and pull myself into my increasingly damp pillow as his words keep raining down on me from a distance.

+++