

LUCY COMES TO STAY

by Robert Bloch

“You can’t go on this way.”

Lucy kept her voice down low, because she knew the nurse had her room just down the hall from mine, and I wasn’t supposed to see any visitors.

“But George is doing everything he can—poor dear, I hate to think of what all those doctors and specialists are costing him, and the sanatorium bill, too. And now that nurse, that Miss Higgins, staying here every day.”

“It won’t do any good. You know it won’t.” Lucy didn’t sound like she was arguing with me. She *knew*. That’s because Lucy is smarter than I am. Lucy wouldn’t have started the drinking and gotten into such a mess in the first place. So it was about time I listened to what she said.

“Look, Vi,” she murmured. “I hate to tell you this. You aren’t well, you know. But you’re going to find out one of these days anyway, and you might as well hear it from me.”

“What is it, Lucy?”

“About George, and the doctors. They don’t think you’re going to get well.” She paused. “They don’t want you to.”

“Oh, Lucy!”

“Listen to me, you little fool. Why do you suppose they sent you to that sanatorium in the first place? They said it was to take the cure. So you took it. All right, you’re cured, then. But you’ll notice that you still have the doctor coming every day, and George makes you stay here in your room, and that Miss Higgins who’s supposed to be a special nurse—you know what she is, don’t you? She’s a guard.”

I couldn’t say anything. I just sat there and blinked. I wanted to cry, but I couldn’t, because deep down inside I knew that Lucy was right.

“Just try to get out of here,” Lucy said. “You’ll see how fast she locks the door on you. All that talk about special diets and rest doesn’t fool me. Look at yourself—you’re as well as I am! You ought to be getting out, seeing people, visiting your friends.”

“But I have no friends,” I reminded her. “Not after that party, not after what I did—”

“That’s a lie.” Lucy nodded. “That’s what George wants you to think. Why, you have hundreds of friends, Vi. They still love you. They tried to see you at the hospital and George wouldn’t let them in. They sent flowers to the sanatorium and George told the nurses to burn them.”

“He did? He told the nurses to burn the flowers?”

“Of course. Look, Vi, it’s about time you faced the truth. George wants them to think you’re sick. George wants you to think you’re sick. Why? Because then he can put you away for good. Not in a private sanatorium, but in the—”

“No!” I began to shake. I couldn’t stop shaking. It was ghastly. But it proved something. They told me at the sanatorium, the doctors told me, that if I took the cure I wouldn’t get the shakes any more. Or the dreams, or any of the other things. Yet here it was—I was shaking again.

“Shall I tell you some more?” Lucy whispered. “Shall I tell you what they’re putting in your food? Shall I tell you about George and Miss Higgins?”

“But she’s older than he is, and besides he’d never—”

Lucy laughed.

“Stop it!” I yelled.

“All right. But don’t yell, you little fool. Do you want Miss Higgins to come in?”

“She thinks I’m taking a nap. She gave me a sedative.”

“Lucky I dumped it out.” Lucy frowned. “Vi, I’ve got to get you away from here. And there isn’t much time.”

She was right. There wasn’t much time. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks—how long had it been since I’d had a drink?

“We’ll sneak off,” Lucy said. “We could take a room together where they wouldn’t find us. I’ll nurse you until you’re well.”

“But rooms cost money.”

“You have that fifty dollars George gave you for a party dress.”

“Why, Lucy,” I said. “How did you know that?”

“You told me ages ago, dear. Poor thing, you don’t remember things very well, do you? All the more reason for trusting me.”

I nodded. I could trust Lucy. Even though she was responsible, in a way, for me starting to drink. She just had thought it would cheer me up when George brought all his high-class friends to the house and we went out to impress his clients. Lucy had tried to help. I could trust her. I must trust her—

“We can leave as soon as Miss Higgins goes tonight,” Lucy was saying. “We’ll wait until George is asleep, eh? Why not get dressed now, and I’ll come back for you.”

I got dressed. It isn’t easy to dress when you have the shakes, but I did it. I even put on some make-up and trimmed my hair a little with the big scissors. Then I looked at myself in the mirror and said out loud, “Why, you can’t tell, can you?”

“Of course not,” said Lucy. “You look radiant. Positively radiant.”

I stood there smiling, and the sun was going down, just shining through the window on the scissors in a way that hurt my eyes, and all at once I was so sleepy.

“George will be here soon, and Miss Higgins will leave,” Lucy said. “I’d better go now. Why don’t you rest until I come for you?”

“Yes,” I said. “You’ll be very careful, won’t you?”

“Very careful,” Lucy whispered, and tiptoed out quietly.

I lay down on the bed and then I was sleeping, really sleeping for the first time in weeks, sleeping so the scissors wouldn’t hurt my eyes, the way George hurt me inside when he wanted to shut me up in the asylum so he and Miss Higgins could make love on my bed and laugh at me the way they all laughed except Lucy and she would take care of me she knew what to do now I could trust her when George came and I must sleep and sleep and nobody can blame you for what you think in your sleep or do in your sleep...

It was all right until I had the dreams, and even then I didn’t really worry about them because a dream is only a dream, and when I was drunk I had a lot of dreams.

When I woke up I had the shakes again, but it was Lucy shaking me, standing there in the dark shaking me. I looked around and saw that the door to my room was open, but Lucy didn’t bother to whisper.

She stood there with the scissors in her hand and called to me.

“Come on, let’s hurry.”

“What are you doing with the scissors?” I asked.

“Cutting the telephone wires, silly! I got into the kitchen after Miss Higgins left and dumped some of that sedative into George’s coffee. Remember, I told you the plan.”

I couldn’t remember now, but I knew it was all right. Lucy and I went out through the hall, past George’s room, and he never stirred. Then we went downstairs and out the front door and the street-lights hurt my eyes. Lucy made me hurry right along, though.

We took a streetcar around the corner. This was the difficult part, getting away. Once we were out of the neighborhood, there’d be no worry. The wires were cut.

The lady at the rooming house on the South Side didn’t know about the wires being cut. She didn’t know about me, either, because Lucy got the room.

Lucy marched in bold as brass and laid my fifty dollars down on the desk. The rent was \$12.50 a week in advance, and Lucy didn’t even ask to see the room. I guess that’s why the landlady wasn’t worried about baggage.

We got upstairs and locked the door, and then I had the shakes again.

Lucy said, “Vi—cut it out!”

“But I can’t help it. What’ll I do now, Lucy? Oh, what’ll I do? Why did I ever—”

“Shut up!” Lucy opened my purse and pulled something out. I had been wondering why my purse felt so heavy but I never dreamed about the secret.

She held the secret up. It glittered under the light, like the scissors, only this was a nice glittering. A golden glittering.

“A whole pint!” I gasped. “Where did you get it?”

“From the cupboard downstairs, naturally. You know George still keeps the stuff around. I slipped it into your purse, just in case.”

I had the shakes, but I got that bottle open in ten seconds. One of my fingernails broke, and then the stuff was burning and warming and softening—

“Pig!” said Lucy.

“You know I had to have it,” I whispered. “That’s why you brought it.”

“I don’t like to see you drink,” Lucy answered. “I never drink and I don’t like to see you hang one on, either.”

“Please, Lucy. Just this once.”

“Why can’t you take a shot and then leave it alone? That’s all I ask.”

“Just this once, Lucy, I have to.”

“I won’t sit here and watch you make a spectacle of yourself. You know what always happens—another mess.”

I took another gulp. The bottle was half-empty.

“I did all I could for you, Vi. But if you don’t stop now, I’m going.”

That made me pause. “You couldn’t do that to me. I need you, Lucy. Until I’m straightened out, anyway.”

Lucy laughed, the way I didn’t like. “Straightened out! That’s a hot one! Talking about straightening out with a bottle in your hand. It’s no use, Vi. Here I do everything I can for you, I stop at nothing to get you away, and you’re off on another.”

“Please. You know I can’t help it.”

“Oh, yes, you can help it, Vi. But you don’t want to. You’ve always had to make a choice, you know. George or the bottle. Me or the bottle. And the bottle always wins. I think deep down inside you hate George. You hate me.”

“You’re my best friend.”

“Nuts!” Lucy talked vulgar sometimes, when she got really mad. And she was mad, now. It made me so nervous I had another drink.

“Oh, I’m good enough for you when you’re in trouble, or have nobody else around to talk to. I’m good enough to lie for you, pull you out of your messes. But I’ve never been good enough for your friends, for George. And I can’t even win over a bottle of rotgut whiskey. It’s no use, Vi. What I’ve done for you

today you'll never know. And it isn't enough. Keep your lousy whiskey. I'm going."

I know I started to cry. I tried to get up, but the room was turning round and round. Then Lucy was walking out the door and I dropped the bottle and the light kept shining the way it did on the scissors and I closed my eyes and dropped after the bottle to the floor...

When I woke up they were all pestering me, the landlady and the doctor and Miss Higgins and the man who said he was a policeman.

I wondered if Lucy had gone to them and betrayed me, but when I asked the doctor said no, they just discovered me through a routine checkup on hotels and rooming-houses after they found George's body in his bed with my scissors in his throat.

All at once I knew what Lucy had done, and why she ran out on me that way. She knew they'd find me and call it murder.

So I told them about her and how it must have happened. I even figured out how Lucy managed to get my fingerprints on the scissors.

But Miss Higgins said she'd never seen Lucy in my house, and the landlady told a lie and said I had registered for the room alone, and the man from the police just laughed when I kept begging him to find Lucy and make her tell the truth.

Only the doctor seemed to understand, and when we were alone together in the little room he asked me all about her and what she looked like, and I told him.

Then he brought over the mirror and held it up and asked me if I could see her. And sure enough—

She was standing right behind me, laughing. I could see her in the mirror and I told the doctor so, and he said yes, he thought he understood now.

So it was all right after all. Even when I got the shakes just then and dropped the mirror, so that the little jagged pieces hurt my eyes to look at, it was all right.

Lucy was back with me now, and she wouldn't ever go away any more. She'd stay with me forever. I knew that. I knew it, because even though the light hurt my eyes, Lucy began to laugh.

After a minute, I began to laugh, too. And then the two of us were laughing together, we couldn't stop even when the doctor went away. We just stood there against the bars, Lucy and I, laughing like crazy.