

Wardens For The Other You

By

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(Julie, a naturally vibrant woman in her early 30s sits on the sofa of her apartment. The room is artfully furnished but the walls are bare. There are nails jutting from the white surfaces where paintings have been removed.)

At one side of the room is the front door. On the other is a hallway to the rest of the house.

There is a knock at the door.)

MARTA (OS)

Hello, Julie?

(Knocking again.)

Hello? Sweetheart? Come on, it's bad luck to yell at closed a door.

(Julie rises and moves quickly to the door and unlocks it. Marta enters. She is Julie's age, pretty but with a rough undertone. While dressed relatively conservatively, Marta has visible tattoos and piercings. The women embrace warmly. Marta breaks first and looks into Julie's eyes.)

JULIE

I didn't know that. Is that true about yelling through a door?

MARTA

It is for me. How are you, doll?

JULIE

Marta, I'm, I don't know. I'm ... numb.

MARTA

I guess that's, well, that's just fine. I'm here now. The doctor is in.

(Julie breaks into a smile.)

JULIE

Marta, I just don't know what to say.

MARTA

You don't have to ...

JULIE

I just haven't been feeling, I mean, do you think it's normal to feel, *nothing*?

MARTA

Yes. Sure. You must be ah, pre-feeling. Maybe you're getting ready to focus your emotions.

(Julie puts on a face of doubt.)

MARTA

Or not. But I'm sure it's normal, honey. Or, if not normal, it's exceptional. Who says you have to feel ordinary at a time like this?

JULIE

But that just doesn't seem right.

MARTA

He was your damn husband. You can feel however you want.

(Julie looks away toward the hallway.)

MARTA

Oh, I'm sorry, Jules.

(Julie turns back chipper.)

JULIE

No, its fine. Told you. Nothing doing.

MARTA

Nothing?

JULIE

Nada. I just forgot to put the kettle on. For tea. Do you want some?

MARTA

Sure. Why not. And I am sure its fine.

(Julie slips off to the kitchen. Marta hangs her coat and begins to wander around the living room searching the walls with her eyes.)

JULIE (OS)

How long can you stay?

MARTA

All week.

JULIE (OS)

Really? I thought you weren't supposed to take time off during the show.

MARTA

You're not. But I pulled some strings.

(Julie emerges from the kitchen.)

MARTA

Just for you.

JULIE

God, Marta. I'm so glad you're here.

MARTA

At least you feel that.

JULIE

I feel pretty normal about everything else - I just don't feel for or about or around or anything about John.

MARTA

There's no charting grief, child. I'm telling you, everybody deals with hardship differently.

JULIE

Yeah, hardship. Yeah. I hope so.

(Marta again searches the walls with her eyes.)

MARTA

Julie, I just real- Where are all your paintings?

JULIE

What?

MARTA

I knew this room felt vacant. You're paintings. You took them down?

JULIE

John did.

(Marta becomes suddenly indignant.)

MARTA

Why?

JULIE

They're in the garage. John wanted to paint the house or something.

MARTA

Are they all right in there?

JULIE

I guess.

MARTA

How long have they been in there?

JULIE

I don't know. A couple of days. What are you upset about?

MARTA

I'm just ... I don't know why you don't take that work seriously.

JULIE

Oh god. Cause everybody takes me way too seriously already. That's why I ...

MARTA

Because the work is good. It's genius, Julie.

JULIE

You sound like my mom.

MARTA

I don't care. Let's get them...

JULIE

They're fine out there! We'll get them when we get them.

MARTA

All right. I just think ... I'm sorry, I just, I don't know - they're important.

JULIE

I know. But I have some other things going on here.

MARTA

I know. OK. I'm sorry. We should be focusing on John, I guess.

JULIE

Yes.

MARTA

That is if it doesn't bother you.

JULIE

No. Not at all.

MARTA

Really?

JULIE

Yes.

MARTA

Can you tell me, ah, no.

JULIE

What?

MARTA

Can you say how it was done?

JULIE

Marta!

MARTA

I mean, how it happened? Oh my, God! Sorry!

JULIE

It's fine. Totally kidding.

MARTA

Oh my god!

JULIE

I know. I'm horrible. I think I am going to be the worst widow ever.

MARTA

You are.

JULIE

It's true.

(Pause)

MARTA

So?

JULIE

Oh, right. Poisoned.

MARTA

Really?

JULIE

Something in his coffee, a sleeping pill or something. Dropped off right at his desk in his office. An intern found him.

MARTA

Ick. So grim. Poor John.

JULIE

That's what I thought. He never liked any of the interns.

MARTA

No. Poison. That's intense. I mean that takes planning. That takes, I don't know, conviction. That's one dedicated soul.

JULIE

That's what the police keep dwelling on. Apparently if he'd been stabbed, or shot, or strangled, or

beaten, or drowned, or anything else they would think of the crime a whole other way. I don't really understand why people have to dwell on the *poison*. I think it would be much worse to have been shot, personally. I mean its not like there was blood all over ...

MARTA

Julie, you, ah, you sound a bit morbid, honey.

JULIE

I know. I think I must be in shock or something. I told you. I'm not dealing with this normally.

MARTA

You feel something isn't right, ok, but we'll get through it. I know things weren't always so great up here, so maybe you're just conflicted. Maybe your spirits are misaligned.

JULIE

Marta. You know I don't go in for that new age ... stuff.

MARTA

That stuff is all around you so maybe you should think about it. I mean, I'm sorry. Do you want to talk about something else?

JULIE

Whatever.

MARTA

Ok ... ah.

JULIE

I don't know. Tell me about the New York. I miss it.

MARTA

OK, um. The city is good. McCellens finally closed.

JULIE

Oh no.

MARTA

Yeah. They're putting in a coffee house or an oxygen bar or something ludicrously yuppie like that.

JULIE

Oh, what a crime?

MARTA

I know. Those people should be shot in the street.

JULIE

Really! How's the show?

MARTA

Can't complain that much. New lion tamer. Gay. New trapeze act. Germans. They're making things a little more exciting.

JULIE

Yeah?

MARTA

Their third man, Sven Longhammer ...

JULIE

No.

MARTA

Oh yeah. That's the real name, Longhammer. If I was lying it would sound more believable - really. So, all the contortionists said he lived up to his title. But they're so whacked out on whatever it is they huff who knows.

JULIE

And?

MARTA

Well, if I must ... It was certainly bigger than a volkswagon, I'll tell you that.

JULIE

Ah!

MARTA

You asked.

JULIE

I'll add that to the list of stories I can't tell my upstate friends.

MARTA

They can't all be prudes up here.

JULIE

They're not really prudes ... They're, I don't know. I've tried telling them about you and I swear they think I am making it up.

MARTA

Really? I'm you're imaginary friend?

JULIE

You try living up here with housewives that never step out of the Hudson Valley. New York is what happens on television. If they don't show it on Sex In The City they just can't get their mind around it.

MARTA

So a roommate turned circus runaway just isn't ready for primetime?

(Marta proudly displays her tattoos.)

JULIE

I can hardly get you on late-night, darling.

(The women laugh together.)

MARTA

Well how do they deal with little miss Picasso living next door?

(Julie becomes suddenly cold.)

JULIE

I don't really tell anyone. John ... People ask a lot of crazy questions when they see my stuff. Get to acting pretty crazy too.

MARTA

That's called genius, love.

JULIE

Whatever.

MARTA

So what? What do they talk about? It's all husbands and kids? What?

JULIE

Oh no. Up here? It's shoes and affairs. Everybody shops the outlets and everybody has affairs.

MARTA

Really?

JULIE

Yeah. Everybody knows each other. It's not like New York where you're afraid to meet people cause they might be an ax murderer. Everybody goes on little visits to each other's houses. There are little barbeques. And suddenly everybody is going to bed together.

MARTA

Wow. Who knew the Hudson valley was such a swinging place?

JULIE

I know. I was shocked when I got up here.

(Pause)

MARTA

Have you?

JULIE

No!

(Pause)

But I thought about it. I mean, I had an offer.

MARTA

Oh my God! Really?

JULIE

What else are you supposed to do up here?

MARTA

I told you when you left you were going to feel that way. Didn't I?

JULIE

Yes. And that I'd have allergies. And that the quiet would creep me out.

MARTA

I tried to prepare you, sweetheart.

JULIE

And you go out to eat and the staff just saunters over like they're doing you a favor.

MARTA

I know!

JULIE

You even said how your husband would go out and get himself a suburban lobotomy so he's just like the rest of them. And then he can't stand his little artist wife staying home all day and tells her to go get a job at fucking Pottery Barn!

(Marta and Julie lock eyes and are suddenly silent. Julie is on the verge of tears and then starts to laugh uneasily. Marta joins her.)

JULIE

Guess I am just *pre-feeling*.

(Both women force a harder laugh and then fall silent.)

JULIE

You were right about, John though. I got the offer but he went ahead and followed through.

(Pause.)

MARTA

What?

JULIE

I guess it doesn't really count. She was from the city so I guess that doesn't count as an upstate affair.

MARTA

John?

JULIE

Yeah. He went classic. Staying late with the secretary. Bethany something.

(Marta is stunned by Julie's flippant tone.)

MARTA

Oh, Jules. I'm so sorry.

JULIE

It's ok. It's kind of caught up in that numb place. I don't really know how to feel about it. I mean I was pissed but now ...

MARTA

Sure. When did you, I mean, how?

JULIE

Find out about it? Uh, maybe two weeks ago. John told me.

MARTA

Just, just like that.

JULIE

Yeah. We were at the breakfast table. And I told him I liked his tie. He was wearing this new Armani tie and I said I liked it. That's it. And his head kind of drooped down like I killed his dog complimenting him on that tie. And we didn't speak for a moment. Then when he looked back up he told me he was seeing someone else.

(OS - The kettle whistles.)

JULIE

Oops. I'll be right back. Do you want anything in your tea?

(Julie rises to head to the kitchen.)

MARTA

What? No! no. nothing.

JULIE

Okay.

(Julie disappears down the hall and the whistle stops. Marta is visibly shaken by everything her friend has been saying. She stands and moves to one of the walls. Marta reaches out and touches one of the nails Julie's paintings had hung upon. Julie returns carrying two mugs of tea. She hands one over to Marta who inspects and sets it aside. Julie sits, sipping her tea.)

JULIE

What were we talking about?

MARTA

Ahhh, the city?

JULIE

Oh, right. John's affair. And Bethany.

MARTA

Jules you don't have to tell me ...

JULIE

No, I want to. I feel so bad about it.

MARTA

What?

JULIE

But at the same time I'm kind of glad. I mean, John was never home and we just got into this lull. I mean, we were in it before we were married. I don't know why I thought getting married and moving way up here would fix things. And neither of us knew what to do. We weren't sleeping together, I told you that.

MARTA

You told me you weren't getting along. You said, ah maybe divorce.

JULIE

Yeah. It just didn't seem like divorce was an option though.

(There is a knock at the door.)

JULIE

Oh, I forgot. I expect that's them now.

MARTA

Who?

JULIE

The police.

MARTA

The police?

(Marta is nervous as Julie crosses the room to the door)

JULIE

Well, detectives I guess if you need to be specific.

(Julie opens the door. Outside is Detective Sean Stenson. He is a large, fit and drab looking police officer.)

SEAN

Hi Jules, ah, Ms. White.

JULIE

Hi Sean. Come in.

(Julie leads Sean into the living room.)

JULIE

Marta. This is Sean Stenson.

SEAN

Detective.

MARTA

I see. Hello, detective.

JULIE

Do you want some tea, Sean?

SEAN

Yeah.

JULIE

Extra sugar, right?

SEAN

Yeah.

(Julie scampers off the kitchen. Sean and Marta regard each other awkwardly.)

SEAN

So what do you do?

MARTA

I'm a tight-rope-walker in the big apple circus.

SEAN

Yeah right.

MARTA

Really.

SEAN

Sure. You don't have to tell me. I'm just here to check on Julie.

MARTA

Ah. Okay. That's nice of you detective.

SEAN

Nah. It's my job. Three times a day to make sure she hasn't left the house.

(Sean looks around the room suddenly, scanning the walls as Marta had.)

SEAN

She moved the paintings.

MARTA

What?

SEAN

The paintings. She took down the paintings. She does these incredible ...

MARTA

I know. She said John took them down. They were going to paint the house.

SEAN

Nah. They were up yesterday.

MARTA

What?

SEAN

I don't feel right about this. There's something ...

MARTA

I felt that too.

(Julie returns with another mug. Sean blows the steam off the top and sips. Marta's eyes are glued to him.)

JULIE

Here you go. Did they find that Bethany yet, Sean?

SEAN

Nah. Hasn't been back to her apartment. Parents and friends haven't seen her either. Julie what...

JULIE

That's too bad.

SEAN

Yeah. Listen, what...

MARTA

You mean Bethany, the secretary?

JULIE

Yeah. John's Bethany. Yeah. What's her last name, Sean?

SEAN

I'm not supposed to tell you.

JULIE

Oh right.

(To Marta.)

Bethany is the other suspect.

SEAN

Bethany Wittins.

JULIE

That's right. Wittins.

MARTA

So, you think Bethany poisoned John?

SEAN

Yeah. Julie...

JULIE

I don't know who else it would have been. I just hope they find her before she does something crazy.

SEAN

Julie, what happened to your paintings?!

JULIE

I took them down. They're in the garage.

MARTA

Why?

SEAN

Yeah, why?

JULIE

I wanted to.

(Pause.)

I wanted to. That's not a crime.

(No one knows what to say. Out of the silence Sean's radio beeps and a static voice is audible.)

RADIO

Red Five. You around?

(Sean stammers to pull his radio off his belt. He turns from the women.)

SEAN

This is Red Five. I'm in country. Let me shout back under-cover. OK?

(To Marta and Julie.)

Excuse me ladies. Mind if I use your kitchen phone, Jules?

JULIE

No. Go ahead.

(Sean heads off in the direction of the kitchen. Marta watches as he walks out and then turns to Julie.)

MARTA

Now just what the hell is that about?

JULIE

What?

MARTA

Telling me John moved the paintings.

JULIE

I didn't want you to get upset.

MARTA

Upset? Well I guess that's why you didn't say anything about being a *suspect*?

JULIE

I'm not worried.

MARTA

Why not?

JULIE

Cause I didn't do anything. And Sean.

MARTA

Sean? The cop who's keeping you under house arrest.

JULIE

He's pretty intense guy once you get to know him. Very in tune with the vibrations. You'd like him. And, I mean, I told you I had an offer.

MARTA

What?

SEAN

Sean. He's the one. The one who offered.

(Pause.)

To have an affair with me.

MARTA

And you think that means he's going to protect you if ...

JULIE

If what? You don't think I ...

MARTA

No!

JULIE

Then what are you worried about. What am I worried about? It's funny. Its like I know I didn't do anything but there's this part of me that's frightened to death here.

(Sean shuffles back into the living room. His head is hung low.)

JULIE

Sean. Is everything alright?

SEAN

They found that girl. Bethany Wittins. They found her, dead.

JULIE

Oh no.

(Marta stands, animated robotically like she's in shock.)

MARTA

Suicide! It had to have been suicide. Right?

SEAN

Nobody is sure.

JULIE

Not sure?

MARTA

How can they not be sure?

SEAN

Seems like she's been dead a while now. A day before John it looks like, so ...

(Sean, Julie and Marta look at each other like they don't know what to do next.)

MARTA

Julie, everything is going to be all right.

JULIE

What?

MARTA

Honey. We're going to get you the best lawyers. And we're going to beat this thing. And you are going to be back in the city, just painting up a storm in no time.

(Marta hesitantly puts her arms around Julie.)

SEAN

Yeah. You're friend is right.

MARTA

See. We can work this thing into a whole new life.

JULIE

What? What are you saying?

MARTA

Jules. Please.

SEAN

Try and keep calm.

JULIE

This just doesn't make any sense!

(to Marta)

If Bethany was killed a day before John, well I was with John at his parents trapped all fucking weekend in his parents house.

(to John)

And the day John died I was up here with Connie and Sarah Connors while they were strong-arming into buying fucking Mary Kay.

(Marta and John look at each other dumbfounded.)

JULIE

What? I can't have my own defense? There it is.

MARTA

No, um, Julie, no. That's exactly what we need - a simple concise defense. The only thing that would make it air tight is if we could just find another suspect.

JULIE

You mean the murderer.

MARTA

Yes.

SEAN

Well, I know the boys are working on it. So don't ...

MARTA

Sure they are.

(Marta looks at Sean with daggers in her eyes.)

MARTA

It's the only way things are open and shut, though, right Sean? If somebody with the right motive on things gets caught or turns himself in.

(Again the three characters find themselves silent but Marta keeps her eyes locked on Sean.)

SEAN

Do you think maybe we should get your paintings?

MARTA

Good idea.

JULIE

What?

SEAN

I just think we should get them inside is all.

JULIE

Why? Sean!

SEAN

I just don't like the idea they could be out there getting rained on or something. And I'd like to see one before I go.

(Sean begins to head out the back door. Julie tries to follow but Marta holds on to Julie.)

MARTA

We'll be right there.

JULIE

Sean. What's going on?

(Out of earshot, Sean doesn't answer. Marta guides Julie back over to the couch.)

MARTA

Just let him look one more time. Then he'll go.

JULIE

What? Are you crazy?

MARTA

Jules! Don't you see it? Don't you just feel it off him? He killed John and, and ...

(Julie moves to speak against Marta but then stops to think further.)

JULIE

No. How? No.

MARTA

Think about it. He wanted to have an affair with you. You said no. But he loves ... He sees you wasting away in here. Not painting just, strangling that other, killing the artist in you ...

JULIE

Marta ...

MARTA

No. He saw it and it was goading him. I can see that in him. It drove him. Babe, it was a siren calling to a sailor watching you with John. It was a hardship. A real hardship.

JULIE

And, oh. He killed John.

(Julie begins to weep quietly. Sean returns carrying a canvas wrapped in brown paper and twine. Tears have streaked his face.)

SEAN

They're all wrapped up. You wrapped them all up.

JULIE

I couldn't look at them. I knew they had something to do with this.

(Julie tries to hold back more tears. Sean tears open a piece of the brown paper and admires the revealed portion of the painting.)

SEAN

Oh! This is one of my favorites.

(After looking, Sean gingerly folds the paper back in place and leans the painting carefully against a wall.)

SEAN

The other ones are out there. They look pretty safe.

(The women do not answer him. Julie keeps her eyes averted but Marta holds his gaze steady.)

SEAN

I'm going back to the station. I got to get ready. Got to get some things off my chest. Goodbye, Jules.

(Even as Sean exits Julie will not look at him. Sean looks one last time to her and then to the painting. Sean leaves closing the door behind him.)

MARTA

It's going to be all right, doll. Now, we should get out of this house. Head back to the city until this thing blows over. You can stay with me.

JULIE

Marta, I think you better go too.

MARTA

What? Why, honey?

JULIE

If Sean has got to leave, so do you, right?

MARTA

Sweetheart. I'll leave if you want but...

JULIE

No you've got to. Sean isn't guilty all the way. I saw him, the day I was at John's parents. I saw him driving by, watching me. So, Bethany Wittens, it was someone - someone else.

MARTA

Julie ...

JULIE

But you didn't know you had an ally up here, working on the same thing from the other side. What are the chances?

MARTA

When things align like that it's not chance, Julie.  
You better get used to that.

(Marta looks into Julie's eyes for a moment and then kisses her. Marta gathers her coat and bags and looks to Julie and the painting.)

MARTA

Keep them safe.

(Marta exits. Julie rises and moves to the painting. She brings it center stage and tears open the wrapping. The audience can only see the back of the canvas. She weighs the painting in her mind. Julie cries out and shreds the canvas with her hands.)

BLACKOUT OUT