

Spring Shower

Since the fight on Pam's birthday, the first day of spring, Don had bought a new car and grown a beard. He made up a lot of excuses, but in truth he did not know why he made the changes. He only knew he should. He also fell back into some old habits: after testing five other brands of dandruff shampoo and suffering through three months of disappointments, this morning he went back to that damn Extra Strength Denorex.

He lathered up and massaged the brown gunk into his scalp. While the water buzzed on his chest, he closed his eyes and took a big whiff of the medicated shampoo. The harsh scent brought back memories that Don had considered dead and gone.

Don was embarrassed about his dandruff problem, and since college he had transferred Denorex into an empty Suave brand bottle and left it in the shower, as if houseguests would be nosy enough to check his shampoo and nod approvingly at Suave. Don had known Pam for three weeks when he let her in on the secret. The shower seemed an appropriate spot.

"What's that smell?" Pam covered her nose with a foamy wrist. "That stuff smells horrible. What is it?" She soaped

herself as the shower head pelted her with streams of water.

Don stared at the off-yellow tile as he massaged his scalp. "Extra Strength Denorex. It's got menthol in it. That's what you smell. I have psoriasis on my scalp. My dermatologist says it's the best stuff you can buy in stores." Don spoke softly, just loud enough to be heard over the shower.

"It's burning my eyes, darling." While Pam's voice was harsh, she was smiling. How should he read that?

She started lathering her breasts.

"Let me help you there," he said. Washcloth in hand, he wiped the soapy residue from Pam's curves in little circular motions. Pam closed her eyes and clasped her hands behind her head. The bathroom light played off her smooth, wet skin. Don forgot about the tingly Denorex in his hair and concentrated on his self-appointed task. He scrubbed Pam's chest, her shoulders, her toned stomach. His breathing got more and more regular.

Then she spoke his name. He jumped, as if he had forgotten that Pam could talk. She continued: "Seriously, that menthol crap is stinging my eyes."

He switched places with Pam, clumsily, and rinsed the shampoo out of his hair. While he labored under the showerhead, Pam finished scrubbing herself off and stepped out of the shower. The blow dryer roared to life before Don even knew she was gone.

The memory ended there. The menthol foam swirled clockwise through the drain. His toe moved back and forth on

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the drain for a moment. He positioned his face in front of the streaming shower and let the water splash around his head, dripping and splattering like frantic tears.

Back when it began, everyone warned Don and Pam about the dangers of an office relationship. Gossip was inevitable: vicious rumors, whispering, pointing. But since Pam worked in market development and Don in human resources, they weren't likely to rub shoulders unless it was planned. They decided it was worth the risk.

The next weekend, Pam made her entrance to the office Christmas party ten minutes late. "There's my date," said Don, and his human resources colleagues turned to see Pam making her way to their table. She wore a new red dress, a new overcoat, and carried a frilly gift in her right hand.

"Hi, handsome," she said, flashing a sly smile. "Here's your present." While their co-workers and the company executives looked on, Don untied the ribbon and showed off two tickets to a concert coming up in late January. He thanked her with a kiss and that was it; they had gone public.

Pam displayed her affection for Don very freely, which occasionally made him feel awkward. She would leave a steaming cup of hot cocoa or a rose on his desk while she knew he was doing an exit interview for a terminated employee. Don kept his romantic side more private. He once slipped a hand-copied poem by D. H. Lawrence onto her desk, and he left cute messages on her answering machine at home. That was the extent of it.