

The Watcher

Keith J. Bowers

This is a work of fiction. None of the characters are real people and any similarity is strictly coincidental.

It may not be reproduced, shared or transmitted for a fee by any party to whom the Author has not contractually granted permission.

The author retains all rights not explicitly granted within.

Published by Keith J. Bowers
kjbowers1@hotmail.com

Copyright 2005 by Keith J. Bowers

The Watcher

Clorox. His hands smelled like Clorox and the closet reeked of it. As he dried the tray with the towel, he came to the conclusion that the stench would never go away. Keith had been there all day, his pants and shirt were soaked, the apron providing absolutely no protection except to keep him damp. Toes squished in his boots, the water soaking through the leather and into his socks. He'd have trench foot if he didn't get out of them soon. His shift was on the downside of eight hours - after lunch things tended to slow down. The stainless steel pans from lunch still sat in the sink, soaking their crusty edges to soften the remains. He would get to them eventually.

He sighed and sat another tray down, placing a sheet of paper between them. When he looked up, he saw her lithe form bounce past the doorway of the closet. Jessica. Her auburn hair was long and rich, pulled back like a rope and tied in the customary ponytail. Even in her walk, she displayed her exuberance and confidence. Unlike him.

He couldn't even talk to her. Though he wanted her. She barely came up to his chin, and she was reed thin with full lips and sparkling brown eyes. Eyes that could bare your soul.

Jess was with Kenny - they had been together since he had first come to know them. Kenny was another dishwasher, oozed charm and attracted women like flies to fruit. Subordinate to him, it was a bone of contention between them, Kenny never liked to take orders, especially from someone as geeky and nerdish as Keith. But they took them

anyway because he knew the ropes, he knew how to get them done and out before the sun fell from the sky. His prowess at his job allowed Ken more time with Jess.

His girlfriend - if you could call her that - was an explosive red head with a bad self image. She spent hours upon hours in front of the mirror – countless hours – adjusting her makeup. Over and over again. And she was unresponsive to his needs, always promising, but never fulfilling. The thought of her depressed him. Especially since she worked downstairs, where he'd run into her while he went to collect their lunch dishes.

Jess broke him out of his self loathing for a moment, appearing in the doorway to accost him.

“I've been told I'm supposed to help you tray.”

He nodded and handed her the towel. She immediately picked up a wet tray and wiped it down. He picked up the white paper sheets used to separate the trays, welcome that he wouldn't have to do both tasks. Of course, there were only a few remaining, no more than ten minutes worth. Ten minutes – alone. With her. In a closet. The thought of carnal urges rushed up at him and he squashed them down. Never. Not with her. He grabbed a pile of trays, intent moving them to the stacker

“How are things going between you and Ken?” he asked, feeling like a hypocrite. He knew how things were going between them – great as always. There was never any trouble between them, though Ken tended to wander between Jess and another girl named Lori. However, everyone knew that Jess would eventually win out, she was beautiful and aggressive. Outgoing. Unlike Lori, who seemed reserved and wary of everything.

“Oh, I don't know,” she chimed. “He never lets me give him head any more.”

Keith nearly dropped his stack of trays. “What?”

“He doesn't let me go down on him.”

“Why in god's name wouldn't he?” he asked as he returned to papering the trays.

“It's not his thing. He doesn't like it.”

“Maybe we should switch partners. Jen won't give me anything.”

She laughed and placed the dry tray onto the pile. “Maybe we should.”

Reaching over, he shakily positioned the sterile paper on the center of the tray. God, would he ever like to switch partner. Jess was so hot, so sexy with her pouty lips and bright brown eyes. He stared unabashedly at her form, wanting her right then and there. She didn't even notice - intent on getting the job done. This was going too quickly. She

didn't look up at him, placing the next tray down. A paper followed. Tray, paper. Tray paper. Done.

At that moment, Ken passed by the closet and he tweaked her ass. Squealing, she tossed the towel at Keith and scampered off in pursuit of her man. He watched her run after Ken, wrapping her arms around him as they disappeared through the doors to the dining room. A deep sense of depression crushed down upon him as he picked up the dried pile of trays and moved them to the stacker. Another hour and he'd be free. Until then, the dishes sat in their filthy water...

* * *

A year later...

The beer tasted foul, but then all beer did. It was only his second beer – only his second ever in his eighteen year life. How did people drink this stuff? Coors Light. The Silver Bullet.

None of the guys in the hotel were old enough to drink, but that didn't stop them. An entrepreneurial individual next door to the hotel would buy the graduates whatever they wanted – at a fifty percent markup.

The beer run had just concluded and fifteen cases were stacked neatly in the bathroom. Drunken Pauly lay next to the toilet bowl, snoring quietly in his own vomit.

Keith sat down at the table, resting his beer on a stained newspaper. Graduating a few days before, he and Mike had left Lancaster and their jobs behind and traveled to the mecca of all Lancastrian graduates – Ocean City.

Mike had friends – he had wrestled in high school, making his quirkiness an acceptable trait. For some reason, likely at Pauly's urging, he had invited Keith along. Pauly worked with Keith at the Lakes in the dishwashing department.

The GameBoy beckoned. Keith picked it up, turned it on and began fiddling with the buttons. Tetris. Not difficult, but it was addictive. Keith had watched others in the hotel room spend hours on it. It never held his attention. Twenty minutes into playing it and he was spent. It held no allure for him.

Ken walked in and flopped down on the couch.

"Hey," he shot out. Ken was obviously drunk. As was everyone else in the

Keith picked up his beer and acknowledged his presence. Ken had quit a few months before, moving on. Jess remained employed at the Valley, but only worked rarely. She was never on the schedule any longer. Outside of the Valley, Ken and Keith weren't friends, Mike, however, was tight with Ken's group of friends.

Curtis staggered in, slamming into the couch beside Ken.

"Christ!" Curtis spat. "They were such cunt faced bitches!"

"Who?" Keith asked.

Curtis jumped up and ran to the bathroom, disappearing from sight. "Fuck! Hasn't this bastard woken up yet?"

Keith looked to Ken for an explanation.

"Curtis ran into some girls last night around 2 am. He gave them the line that he's leaving for the Army in a week and this one girl took him back to his room." Ken gestured with his thumb behind him. "Well, the girl took him in, fucked him and right after he blew his load, jumped up and walked out."

Curtis returned, newly relieved. "Yeah, it was pretty cold how she just fucking left like that. No seconds, no nothing." He pointed to the far wall where a condom was stapled to the wall. "But I kept my souvenir!" Curtis opened the fridge and pulled out a beer. "Unlike Ken over there, who didn't keep his."

Ken shot him a hard look. "It didn't happen."

"What do you mean, 'it didn't happen'?"

Keith looked back and forth at the two of them, trying to decipher what was going on. He had an inkling, but wasn't going to offer up anything. Everyone knew that he was very good friends with Dani, one of Jessica's closest friends.

"I thought that Jess would have been here with you."

Curtis snorted. "Yeah, I bet Ken wishes that too."

Ken stood up and walked to the fridge, pulling out a Coors. "She left two days ago. Had to be home to work." He walked out, punching Curtis in the arm as he went outside. "Fucking learn to keep your mouth shut."

Keith watched them go. Pauly staggered into the kitchen and sat down. He looked like shit. Keith slid his beer towards the red headed guy and watched as Pauly chugged it.

"Hey, what happened between Ken and Jess? Are they having problems?"

Pauly choked and beer spewed out his nose.

“Don’t tell Jess, but Ken’s been banging Lori since she left.”

Keith rolled his eyes. “You’re kidding me!” Pauly shook his head. He felt bad for Jess, but then she knew Ken had issues with women for a long time. Ken had been playing them both off each other for as long as he had known them.

“Yeah, Ken’s having a difficult time juggling those two for a while now,” Curtis chimed in. “Unlike me though, who’s getting all the pussy...”

“What pussy?” Pauly interrupted. “All you had was that skank last night...”

The two proceeded to verbally spar as Keith tuned them out. It was going to be a long night of sobriety...

* * *

Six months later...

He looked down at the envelope, not recognizing the return address. Charleston, Virginia. Who the fuck?... He tore it open, looking down at the letter. He recognized the flowing script. It was Jess. She had written him.

Smiling, he sat down on the bed, perusing the letter. She was enjoying her first semester in college. Ken came to visit on a weekly basis - they were still together. She had decided on pre-law.

Life was moving on for them both. He had finally broken it off completely with the red headed bitch - fully and completely. They hadn’t spoken in three months and he was just now stepping back into the dating pool. He had begun dating Dani, a friend of Jessica’s and that it wasn’t going well either.

A picture fell out from between the pages. Picking it up, he realized it was a photo of her on her graduation day. Her wide smile brightened everything around her. She was beautiful in her black cap and robe. The yellow tassel signifying her success at completing school hung to the left. She seemed as happy in the photograph as in her words in the letter. She had even invited him down to visit her... His heart leaped – an actual invite! Quickly, he pulled out a sheet of paper, beginning his return letter to her. It went out the next day.

Not surprisingly - to him anyway - he never received a reply...

* * *

Two years later...

He stood in the doorways that led out onto the porch, looking out at people outside. Angie, Dani's sister, chased around the neighbor boys like a pudgy teddy bear, her curly blond hair bouncing on her head. Several others crowded around the platters of food and the grill burned hamburgers and hotdogs in the corner.

Two figures caught his eyes. They walked around the corner of the house. One was Jess, drastically changed from when he had last seen her. She was more voluptuous than before, her face fuller and more rotund. Her beauty had changed completely. It wasn't any less, if anything it had grown. Her countenance was dark and brooding, like the beefy man who followed her. He was a good foot taller than her, which mean he was at least six feet.

Dani appeared behind him, she too leaning against the doorframe. They had stayed friends long after their abortive attempt to hook up.

"Who's the guy she's with?"

"That's Bob. She met him at college last year."

"Is he the one she dumped Kenny for?"

"Yeah, he's living with her family for the summer."

"They both look pissed."

"They are. She called before they left. Said they were fighting. He didn't want to come. But then, he never wants to do anything."

Keith shook his head. "I'd kill to go out with her."

"Really?" Dani cocked her head. "I never would have suspected."

"I've always had a thing for her. Ever since back at the Valley."

Dani's eyes never left the pair as they walked slowly down the hill. "I can't understand why she stays with him." Dani stepped out onto the porch, while looking back at him. "He's a dick," she mouthed under her breath.

Keith watched as Jess and Bob both sat down on the swing in the corner and began to pointedly act as if the other did not exist. Others at the party spoke with her, but her

responses were short and quick. Bob never opened his mouth, looking bored and annoyed. Keith moved on, intermingling with the other partiers.

Later, when he went back to speak with Jess, both her and Bob were gone...

* * *

Two years later...

The phone rang. He had moved back home after his messy breakup the previous summer. No one else was home, so he answered it, beating the machine by three rings. Flicking the mute button, he brought the phone to his ear and immediately recognized the voice. Dani.

“Do you remember Jess?”

“Yeah.”

“She’s back from college. Been back for a while now. Dropped out.”

“That’s nice.”

“You should call her.”

“Why?”

“Because she’s not with Bob anymore.”

“So?”

“Aren’t you the one who told you would have jumped at the chance to go out with her?”

Keith pondered this for a moment. Yes, it was true, he had told Dani that he had always held a fascination for Jess, but circumstances had always prevented it. First off, he was a loser in high school, geeky and unrefined. Not much had changed in four years, but he was trying. Second, there was always the competition. Men more handsome, more winsome had always vied for her attentions, which she was attracted to.

His silence provoked Dani to comment. “You should call her.” She went on to give him the number, which he furiously scribbled down. Dani then hung up without saying goodbye.

As he stared at the scribbled numbers, he thought how difficult the past six months had been. Nancy, his fiancée, had left him for a bigger, stronger man whose IQ was low, low, low. He had jumped into a dual rebound relationship with Doreen – both of them

decided to just play it cool since both were just out of long term relationships. She of two years, him of a year and a half. They were disastrous together, she more so than him. It took a month of dating before he realized what the problem was – Doreen had two personalities. One was a sweet church going cute-as-a-button honest woman and the other was a hard drinking, cheating, and Satan worshipping she-demon. The rollercoaster was just too gut wrenching to ride for long.

Now, he was seeing a woman named Michelle, the most beautiful woman he had ever had the pleasure of dating. Michelle was slumming, she was used to men who had money. Currently she was divorced from a black man who was serving five to seven for dealing coke in Harrisburg. This relationship wasn't working out either, considering that she wanted to party hard and fast and loose. He could sense it was ending, the distance between them grew more and more each day.

Jessica.

He had watched her from afar for so long, he wondered if he could remain objective about her. Would he put her on a pedestal like he had with Laura? Would he be able to do the opposite and respect her as a human being rather than the trailer trash that Doreen had been? Could he open himself up to a woman who he had desired for so long, yet never once considered that he could possibly ever have?

It was no longer time to watch. It was time to act. He picked up the phone.

Within an hour he was at her door.

* * *

A month later, he proposed and having no money for a proper ring, he bent and twisted metal bindery wire - the kind used in staples - into a ring, spinning it around to form a circle and then looped it around the outer edge. He modeled it's thickness around his finger, knowing her ring size was close to his. It took six hours to make it, using only his own hands and a pair of metal pilers. Sore and bleeding, he finished it just as she arrived to meet him. He whispered his request to her as he slipped it on her finger. She accepted him as her husband.

Life moves around you, you don't move through it. The one you meet as a gawking teenager may be the one you spend the rest of your life with.

End