

Keep Going, You Crazy BITCH

By Lynn *Magill*

WHY WE LIKE IT: *A harrowing, hair-raising re-tell of an incident within a dysfunctional marriage that could easily past for fiction (horror, dirty realism, grit lit) if it wasn't so appallingly true. The style is hyper-focused and down to details, like you are watching a deep web reality show through a zoom lens. Apart from the skill in recounting this event, we admire the author's pluck for, well, just having the low hangers to tell it. We're also glad she survived this pos. Strong, up front and in your face. (Spacing and format is author's own.)*

Five stars.

QUALITY QUOTABLES (for the love of language)...

I found myself being held over the edge of the balcony, a wad of his blue flannel shirt clutched in each fist so tightly that my fingernails ripped holes in the weave, determined to take him with me if he chose to drop me to the pebbly asphalt below because he wanted more Jack and Coke.

If it's not a rule that you can call someone by their first name after making sure they don't get shot, it sure as shit oughta be.

Keep Going, You Crazy Bitch

You always pay for your education, in one way or another. – Uncle George

Squinting into the Fall dusk, I eased my red 1975 Roadrunner into the AM/PM parking lot and slowly braked into the furthest spot that I could find from the main road. I turned the radio off, as if he could hear me from all the way across the busy 4-lane arterial street. The purple and orange glare of the AM/PM sign advertising gas for .91 cents a gallon – 3 cents more for unleaded – reflected in my rearview mirror, making me blink. I tried to partially obscure both the car and myself from view as much as possible; which was optimistic at best considering I was a 21-year-old woman driving a vehicle painted nearly identical to the Starsky and Hutch mobile thinking that half of a shrub was going to somehow make either of us inconspicuous. As Joe Pesci's girlfriend said in *My Cousin Vinny*: *yeah, you blend*.

Everything was in vulnerable hyperfocus; I felt like a rabbit in an open field. Reaching back to refasten my banana clip, I realized that I was holding my breath and sucked in a deep pull of cool air through my nose, exhaling slowly.

The hedge lining the sidewalk on the other side of the street was made up of what we called “apartment trees”, or arborvitae. I couldn't see much through their old growth, but above their tops was an unobstructed view of the 2nd floor of the Northern Lights Apartments, buildings A and D, that were perpendicular to the street. Painted a faded denim blue with industrial grey trim likely in the same year my car was made, each upper unit featured a deck stained in faux redwood, weathered and streaked with yellowish-green mildew that grows on everything that doesn't move in the Pacific Northwest.

The top corner unit in Building D used to be mine, and still was.....on paper. Up until four weeks ago when my husband (but only technically, just like the apartment) decided that my refusal to accompany him to the bar at 10:00pm after my 14-hour workday was unacceptable. If truth be

told he just wanted the company of my debit card. I found myself being held over the edge of the balcony, a wad of his blue flannel shirt clutched each in each fist so tightly that my fingernails ripped holes in the weave, determined to take him with me if he chose to drop me to the pebbly asphalt below because he wanted more Jack and Coke. Strands of my long hair were caught in my fists, tenuously connecting my head to my lifeline. The ends stuck out from between the webs of my fingers and caught on my watchband. I will NOT end up in a splattered heap in parking spot 328D. The last thing I see on this earth is not going to be a wild-eyed drunk with Bon Jovi hair grimacing above me as his blackened, greasy hands let go and the neighbor has to clean my brains off of his Honda Gold Wing and for what? Because I don't feel like partying that we can't afford after a double shift?

Behind the arborvitae was something else that was still mine: my jacked-up baby blue GMC truck that I was still making payments on, and I was here to take it back. Last time he'd shot at me – and missed – from that same balcony as I sat in the driver's seat frantically turning the key. He'd removed the distributor cap. This time, I came prepared: *AAA, where the fuck are you?*

The grill of a white commercial-sized truck emerged over the hill. It pulled up to the stoplight on the opposite side of the intersection, revealing a large winch on the back and the words *Day & Nite Towing* on the side.

Action.

Fumbling for my keys – I'd left my purse at home; too risky to both leave unattended or carry with me – I scrambled out of the Roadrunner, closing the door quietly and then turning around to push it all the way shut with my butt until the latch clicked. The light hadn't changed yet- if the

tow truck arrived and there was nobody with the vehicle, they would leave AND I would get billed for the erroneous trip, neither of which I could afford.

No time to go to the corner and wait for the crosswalk light – those were valuable extra steps and seconds that I didn't have. I'd have to jaywalk across traffic and dodge cars like *Frogger*. The stakes were comparable, too. The last time I'd attempted to get my truck, a month ago, my best friend had driven me to the complex parking lot and waited with her Monte Carlo idling while I unlocked it and got it started so that she could follow me home. I sat on the grease stained bench seatcover inside the cab and turned the key: *click*. Nothing.

I pumped the gas. Tried turning the key in the ignition again.

Nothing. Christ on a snowmobile.

Breathing more shallowly now, I eased myself out of the high cab and down to the asphalt, my eyes on the apartment for signs of life. Angela rolled down the window of the Monte Carlo, parked on the other side of the truck.

“Won't start?” she whispered.

“*No.*” I whispered back.

Angela looked up at the balcony. “Shit.”

“*Yeah.*”

“You want to go?”

I shook my head no. “Not yet. I'm going to see if he took the battery out. Maybe we can get one at Schuck's.”

She looked at me like I'd lost my mind. "Hurry UP."

Gingerly, I reached under the hood of my truck and felt for the latch. I squeezed it slowly so that maybe it wouldn't make as loud of a metallic *pop* when it opened.

A short, hollow thunk, like a small kettle drum: *unlatched*. I pushed the heavy hood up above my head, wincing at the creaky hinges. Standing on my tiptoes to peer into the engine, I saw the battery was still there. *Strange*. I knew it was running and being driven, as it was frequently absent from the parking lot – and more often than not spotted at either the Riviera lounge (an ill-contained euphemism for *dive bar*) or the apartment of one of their cocktail waitresses.

Angela's car was quietly idling, its fan belt a barely discernable squeak. Still on tiptoes, I steadied myself by placing my hands on the grill, my eyes frantically scanning the engine for anything obviously amiss. And there it was: *the distributor cap*. Actually, there it wasn't. *Gone. Motherfucker.*

The shot startled me out of my amateur mechanic ambitions. Loud and echoing, it reverberated against the concrete and was buffered by the apartment trees. I'd been so engrossed in trying to see what was wrong with the truck that I'd forgotten to keep an eye on the apartment.

John stood against the deck railing, his silhouette illuminated by the light from inside. Backlit through the sliding glass door that he'd left open, the hanging lamp in the dining room washed the entire balcony in yellowish fluorescent glare. His hair was flat on one side, as if he'd been lying down on it or napping. His thin frame – not a tall man, maybe 5'7 – was wearing a faded black *Lynyrd Skynyrd* t-shirt and the only pants he ever wore in his entire life: blue Levi 501's. He squinted, and as he grimaced I could see the black outline around his right front tooth; the

one where the veneer thing that he didn't take care of kept sliding down. He brought his right hand up over the railing to get a grip on his old black powder pistol with both hands again.

Leaving the hood open, I scrambled behind the side of the truck the farthest away from John, ducking underneath the passenger side window in the space between it and Angela's car. Half-squatting, I began to shake.

He won't shoot through the truck. It's not a clear shot. It's his only transpo, and he might hit the gas tank. Someone is going to hear this and call the cops. I hope they call the cops. He won't hit the truck. Is he still up there? I'm not looking.

Angela cracked her window and hissed: "Get in the car!"

Crawling under it seemed like a good option, but I took my chances and half-hunched half-squat walked around the front end of the Monte Carlo; trying to be a moving target and harder to hit. Angela had already leaned over and opened her passenger side door from inside so that it was slightly ajar.

She had the Monte Carlo in reverse before my butt had connected with the seat and my door had weakly clicked closed: forget about seat belts. *We are getting the fuck out of here.* Backing up so that the rear of the Monte Carlo was just a few feet past the back of the truck, she threw it into drive with a jerky lurch and stepped on the gas.

Slouched in the driver's seat, she had her head pulled down like a turtle, frosted blonde hair barely above the steering wheel, so that she could just see over the dash. I was nearly curled up into a ball in the passenger's seat, watching for cars in the complex parking lot that might pull out of an aisle unaware and t-bone us. I'm not sure what I thought watching for them would do in

the grand scheme of things, but I sure wasn't looking back to see if John was after us on foot. At least we'd be long gone by the time he was able to get downstairs and get the distributor cap back on the truck if he was thinking about chasing us.

Halfway to Angela's mom's house, we pulled off onto a Mountlake Terrace side street of older 1950's cinderblock bungalows and pulled into an empty spot in front of one of the houses. Inching up a little straighter, Angela checked her rearview mirror and side mirrors in the dusky light. I realized that I'd been holding my breath this entire time. My hands were cold and cramped; unclenching them, I rubbed them on the legs of my jeans. It started to dawn on us both that we couldn't go back to either of our houses: that's the first place he'd come looking for us. Or rather, me – Angela was just collateral damage.

This time around Angela had balked at going through that mess again. Who could blame her, really? If I was willing to get shot over some old truck, I was on my own.

Being overwhelmingly in debt will make you make some pretty sketchy choices as a young adult, and I was so far in hock on that redneck vehicle that my still-immature brain just wasn't having any part of letting someone else drive off with it while I still owed more money than I ever had in my life to that point. Even if it meant getting my dumb ass killed.

The stoplight was still red. Bonus: no traffic. Easily loping across the street, eyes on my old apartment, I made it to the sidewalk on the other side. It was more difficult to see the apartment through the line of trees when I was up close, so I walked slowly, looking over my shoulder to see where the tow truck was now. I heard car engines getting closer behind me: the light had changed, so the tow truck should be here any second.

I heard the distinct rumble of its diesel engine as it closed in behind me, and I stopped for a moment to make sure it was turning into the parking lot in case it wasn't *my* tow truck. It was. As the back bumper disappeared around the corner, I veered sharply off the sidewalk and pushed in between two apartment trees, emerging on the other side into the parking lot just as the driver pulled up behind my truck. My white Keds were dirty from the new landscaping bark. I stepped from the bark to the asphalt and positioned myself strategically behind the passenger side door frame; the same place I'd ducked under last time. This time I stood. I needed to look calm, confident and *normal*. *Nothing unusual to see here*.

The tow truck driver slammed his door shut. I winced and glanced up at the apartment. *Dark. Empty. So far, so good*. He wasn't anything to write home about: wearing a blue uniform shirt that said *Mike* and a matching blue cap with the company logo on it, he was straight out of tow truck driver central casting. These were the days before internet, so he carried a yellow booklet of carbon forms in one hand, and a pen in the other.

He had close cropped brown hair, and equally brown eyes; with a faint five o'clock shadow and fainter lines on his neck above his collar that curled up slightly at the tips. His black steel-toed work boots were firm on the pavement. "Are you Lynn?"

"Yes."

"You are wanting this towed to.....Edmonds, the paperwork says? What seems to be the problem?"

"It won't start. I've cranked it and nothing. Looks like the distributor cap is missing."

“The distributor cap is missing?” He looked at me like I was speaking Martian, and repeated it back as if he were learning a phrase in a new language.

“Yes sir.” I was getting impatient now. Staying in one place in this parking lot for too long was hazardous to my health.

“Okay, well!” He said brightly, “I’ll just hook up my jumper cables and we’ll get it checked out here real quick and see what we’ve got.” Mike beamed at me helpfully.

I appreciated the awesome customer service, but frowned slightly, making a little crease in between my eyebrows. “It’s not going to start without a distributor cap. I’ve tried.”

Mike was not impressed with my self-professed mechanical abilities in the slightest. Mild irritation crept into his voice, while he tried to remain polite. “Ma’am. We are required to try and start the vehicle before we tow it to ensure it won’t start. It’s AAA policy.”

I looked up at the apartment. And then back at Mike. “I see. Well, O.K. You do that, and I’ll go wait over there across the street at the AM/PM.” I pointed to the convenience store through the trees for emphasis.

This guy is looking at me like I am batshit crazy. He’s not entirely wrong.

But Mike, bless him, simply said “You’re going to what?”, standing with the yellow tablet froze in mid-air.

I shifted my weight from one newly bark-stained Ked to another. Clasping my hands in front of me, I took a deep breath, and blurted: “This is my truck. I have the title on me. I can prove it. My ex-husband lives in that apartment up there. He took off the distributor cap so that I can’t take it back. Last time I tried he shot at me. And I don’t want to get shot. So anyway.....I’m going to

go across the street and wait there, okay?” I pointed to the AM/PM again; as if he didn’t understand what *across the street* meant the first time I’d said it.

I looked at the apartment again for emphasis. Then back at Mike, as if to say *can you believe this shit?*

At this point, any rational person would have noped out hard and said “Lady, you really need to call 911 and/or your divorce attorney. This is 100% not my gig. I am not fucking Repo Man. Peace out.” But what did St. Mike, Patron Saint of Tow Truck Drivers and Young Women Who Pick Shitty Husbands do? His eyes went wide, and he snapped into a military grade alertness. His tone was slightly singsong, as if he was merely a garcon bringing me more lemon for my Evian. “Oh. WELL. Why didn’t you SAY so? Let me just get this hooked up and we’ll be on our way! Go get your car and I’ll follow you.”

I didn’t think that I had heard him correctly. I was holding my breath again, immobile.

“Go.” Mike motioned towards the AM/PM with a jerk of his head.

I went. Back through the bark, my hair catching in the apartment trees, I heard the winch groan as he lowered it to hook up to the GMC. *No cars. Fuck yes.* I ran, reaching into my pocket to grab my keys mid-stride; at the ready for when I got to the Roadrunner.

Mike was waiting alongside the curb on the arterial street, the GMC tilted on the hook behind the *Day & Nite Towing* truck. His neck craned out the window, watching for me in the windows of the cars that passed. I rolled my window down and threw my left arm up in the air, raising it high to signal that it was me. His baseball cap bobbed as he nodded in acknowledgement and threw

his own left arm out of his window, motioning frantically as if he were herding me forward: *go, go, go, go, hurry up, hurry up, hurry up, whatever you do don't stop, keep going you crazy bitch.*

The stoplight Gods were in our favor: we hit every green one along the main roads. After we'd made it a couple of miles with no signs of my husband, pursuit, or gunshots, I finally let myself breathe in. Hitting a red light on 156th and Fryhaus Way, I rolled my window down and put my left arm up again in a wave/salute; checking on Mike in my rear view mirror. *You okay back there?*

Mike had his elbow hanging out of his window, and he raised just his forearm and spread the fingers on his left hand in response. He grinned every so slightly. *Yeah. Aight back here. So far so good. Keep going you crazy bitch.*

Mom met us in the middle of the street front of the house in a pair of yellow terry cloth shorts, slippers, and a t-shirt stretched around her round stomach. Bud Light in one hand, and a lit Kool in the other; she was probably on her 2nd pack of both. "Can he back it into the back yard? We can shut it in the gate and lock it, and it'll be more hidden and harder to get to there."

Mike could. Expertly. He lingered in the neighbor's alleyway behind our house, writing on the yellow notepad.

"Go lock the gate, Lynn." Mom handed me a padlock and gestured towards the fence. I slipped the chrome lock through the latch and heard the tow truck door open.

"Ma'am? I need you to sign this for AAA." Mike held out the yellow form and pen to me. He's formal all of a sudden, like we totally just haven't been through a life-or-death situation together. If it's not a rule that you can call someone by their first name after making sure they don't get

shot, it sure as shit oughta be. As if he didn't just have an entire Cliff's Notes version of every bad decision I've ever made in my life up to that point (there would be more...aren't there always?) play out right in front of him.

I didn't even read it. Sometimes, I wish I had a copy of it. I have no idea what it said, or what I signed. I was alive. "I cannot tell you how much I appreciate this. Really. I mean...."

Mom stuck her hand in through the neck of her t-shirt and pulled out a wad of bills from her bra. She counted off four of them – twenties – and handed them to Mike. "Thank you for getting dumbfuck her truck back."

Mike looked at Mom, and then me. Nodded. "Thank you."

And with another expert backing-up of the tow truck, he was gone.

The truck: The distributor cap was a fairly easy fix. It ran for a couple more years until it developed a terminal rod knock and I still owed more on it than it was worth. My father drove me back to the used car lot that I originally bought it from – at 28% interest – and we returned it to them in exchange for them forgiving the rest of the loan with no penalty.

John: skipped the state with yet another cocktail waitress, along with one of our checkbooks and a string of bills. It took me another year to divorce that motherfucker *in absentia*, and another five after that to pay off his string of debt that was still considered community property. Sitting in my bathrobe at the Marriott in St. John, USVI, I stopped with my coffee cup in midair as I read from my balcony on the beach: *Wyoming Man involved in fatal motorcycle accident.*

Possible driver impairment is being investigated. 25 years to the month from when this story took place; 4 months after he had cleared his final warrant.

Keep going, you crazy bitch.

Thanks again, Mike. I owe you.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *“Keep Going, You Crazy Bitch” is the 100% true story of the events that transpired after I had finally decided to leave my first husband at the age of 21 after realizing that I valued saving my life – literally - more than other people’s opinions. The reason I tell these stories is a social and psychological commentary on how our upbringing shapes our ‘dysfunction radar’ – and also that it can be recalibrated. There is a relationship between small kindnesses and decisions in the moment that can change our trajectories. Most importantly, I write about trauma because while I have been fortunate enough to have had closure for decades, others have not (yet!) and knowing that they are not alone, unique, or hopeless is critical. It is my own way of offering them a seat at the table with those of us who have pushed through and now have the life – and security – they deserve. As the cliché goes: you can’t choose the cards you were dealt, but you can choose how you play them. My writing is particularly inspired by Hillbilly Elegy by J.D. Vance as our backgrounds are extremely similar, and continually by Mike Perry, author of Population 485. If Bill Bryson and Christopher Moore had a love child, that’d be pretty much perfect to me, although I expect their spouses might have an opinion on that. I also really wanted to send a thank you out into the universe to Mike, wherever he may be, for saving my bacon all those years ago. I’ve tried not to waste the opportunity.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: Lynn Magill lives in Western Washington with deep Iowa roots that influence many aspects of her work. She writes poetry and nonfiction and is also a painter and visual artist. She is scheduled to graduate from Central Washington University in Winter 2021 with a master’s degree in Professional and Creative Writing. She has two nonfiction pieces scheduled for publication in Spring of 2021 in an anthology via McFarland & Sons, and is currently published in *Route 7 Review*, *The Good Life Review*, and *Thin Air Magazine*. Lynn loves to travel and spend time with her husband on their Texas ranch herding goats and finding any excuse to avoid being within range of cell phone reception.

"There are two kinds of people in this world: the takers and the givers. The takers sometimes eat better, but the givers always sleep better." - Danny Thomas

