

## **The Return**

by Jeffery Greb

Monday night, the end of a three-day weekend, Mark pulled off the freeway nearing the end of the road trip. As he guided the car to a stop at the light at the end of the ramp, he glanced over at Sue beside him. She looked straight ahead, her profile illuminated by the streetlight. The signal turned green, and they moved forward.

What a great weekend, Mark thought. A bit of a drive up the coast, but worth it. Suzie had suggested the trip. She had found and booked the motel. They had literally been right on the beach; a sliding glass door led from the room to the sand. Although it was January, they had been lucky: the weather cooperated with their junket. While it had been cloudy, that just meant beautiful sunsets.

They had left the city later than he had hoped, and he had been a little peeved at the start of the drive. His attitude soon brightened, however, and they spent most of the drive passing the time by singing along with the music blaring through the car stereo. They were all over each other before the room door swung shut. Mark was glad their room had a gas fireplace, so a fire was quickly lit for them to lie before. Thank goodness for pizza delivery. Just had to throw on robes when the food arrived.

Sunday, well, Sunday started with the NFC Championship Game followed by the AFC. Both went to the wire. Suzie, not wanting to bother his enjoyment, went for a long walk on the beach. He opened the sliding glass door to let the breeze in and raided the minibar. A seagull came to the open door, and Mark tossed it a peanut. He was surprised when the thing stepped into the room and opened its wings. The bird seemed much larger inside the room than it did outside. He got it to leave again by tossing some more peanuts past it outside then shut the door.

After the second game, a lovely romantic dinner at a restaurant on the pier a short stroll from the motel. The water, the waves, the candlelight, and, oh my god, the shrimp! Nice, nice, nice, and nice. Then back to the room.

Maybe it was time to take this to the next level, Mark thought as he turned onto Sue's street. Maybe it was time he finally grew up a little. They could move in together. One rent would be cheaper than two. After some time, well, who knows?

He found a parking space right in front of her apartment building. My luck continues, he thought. Maybe I should bring up the subject now.

“Don’t bother getting out,” Sue said. “I thought I’d give things one last chance. I thought if we got way together, just the two of us, away from those idiot friends of yours. I thought . . . But this isn’t going to work.”

“What do you mean?” Mark asked.

She was already out of the car and opening the back door to get her suitcase. When she looked at him from the backseat, her face illuminated by the dome light, he could tell she had been crying quietly for some time.

“What do I mean? My god, Mark! You wouldn’t even go for a walk with me on the beach. You just sat in the room and watched TV. Goodbye!”

“Come on, Suzie.”

She slammed the door and the car went dark. His eyes adjusted in time for him to see her enter the building and turn an interior corner. And she was gone.