

Free at Last

by Suzy Hopkins

Once upon a time Sharon dragged herself into her tiny kitchen with bags and bags and bags of food for the month, bought with her welfare food card. The house seemed especially quiet. Maybe her teenaged son had gone to bed early. She marched into his room. After all, he ate 10 times more of the food than she did. He could at least help put it away. His room was its usual god-awful mess. But, no Roger. She hollered out the back door in case he was watching the stars – his favorite pastime since his graduation from high school. Still, no Roger.

Tiredly she struggled to put the food away since the frozen things would suffer if left too long out of the freezer.

Sharon stopped for a cigarette break, rubbing her eyes. She went into the crummy bathroom she shared with her son, snuffing out her cigarette in the sink. On the mirror she saw written in toothpaste: "Gone."

Angrily, she said out loud to herself, "You ungrateful bum. You never appreciated me. I gave you the best years of my life. I worked three jobs so you could be in little league. Wait 'til I get my hands on you."

He had been staying out later than usual. She just had to figure out where. Slowly Sharon cruised the bad parts of town figuring his friends must be low-lives like he was. No luck. Beside a large green dumpster she carefully parked her shabby burgundy van. Silently she walked to the corner and waited behind a tall lilac bush thinking, "*I have all the time in the world.*"

She finally saw Roger around two a.m. walking with his arm around the shoulders of a skinny girl. Her sunken eyes reminded Sharon of the drug addicts she saw every day at the clinic where she worked. She followed them with her eyes and saw them enter a weather beaten porch attached to what had been a nice home. This girl was smiling. Why? Roger was a loser. He had no money. No job. They disappeared behind the front door. There seemed to be a party going on inside. As his mother waited behind the lilac bush people left but Roger never came back out that front door. Sharon made her way up the creaky stairs of the old home. She found her unemployed son sitting with the skinny girl at the kitchen table. No food was present, just drug paraphernalia.

"What are you doing here?" her son asked angrily.

She said cheerily, "Why don't you and your friend come for something to eat. I've just been food shopping."

The couple smiled at each other. *Moms!* They climbed into the van.

Sharon made hamburgers with fresh lettuce and tomatoes on buns. In the hamburger she put some arsenic she had been saving for just this purpose.

Quietly her son and his friend ate their hamburgers until they collapsed onto the table - dead.

Sharon smiled and gave a shout, "Free at last."

She lived happily ever after.