



Walls

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To be fair, Hank had not intended to punch out the maitre d'. The man's chin was just unfortunately situated, intercepting by chance the flying haymaker meant for Mrs. H. Quinn Buckton, who was known to her many chic friends as "Pinky."

That day, Hank had proceeded to the Long Hills Country Club, where Pinky presided over the weekly Junior League luncheon, simply to talk. Not a violent man, Hank had wanted to make Pinky aware of his feelings in a civilized way. But just two words crossed her lips, five little syllables, and his pacifism receded, giving way to a fervent desire to knock her big, bleached white teeth out onto the carpet.

"Hello, Sisyphus," she'd said.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate matre d' of the Restaurant at the Country Club, Earl Hawkins, had had no idea what'd caused the brouhaha that suddenly erupted in his foyer. Why the appearance of this unshaven man in torn Carhart overalls had begotten such a cacophony of squawking wealthy females, he did not know. But he determined to intervene, not only to preserve the collegial dining atmosphere for his patrons, but also because "loud altercations" were specifically prohibited in the by-laws of the Club.

Mr. Hawkins pushed his way into the middle of the scene, where the young, thin, and thoroughly accessorized Pinky and her horde of similarly accouterment-equipped women formed a phalanx of agitated estrogen. The woefully underdressed man seemed almost overwhelmed, like a warthog cowed by a coterie of flawlessly manicured jackals.

Hawkins stepped forward quickly and was just about to say, "What seems to be the problem?" when Hank's fist slammed powerfully into his jaw. For an instant, everything went white, and then Hawkins felt himself collapse onto what appeared to be a soft, feather mattress. It was actually Mrs. Peter Archibald, Jr., or "Bitsy," who had added a few inches here and there since the wedding three years ago.

Except for a series of helpless grunts from Bitsy, the group went quiet. Hank eyed Pinky balefully and then watched Bitsy struggle with the weight of Hawkins, who was dazed, but cautiously returning to consciousness.

"You're ruining my life," Hank said bitterly.

Pinky looked at him with cold eyes. "You need help, Mr. Stevens," she said.

Hank thought for a moment, and then spoke. "Fuck you, Pinky."

Before she could retort, he walked out.