

No Destination
by Marie Shield

Dora Mueller tiptoed barefoot across her neatly manicured yard to retrieve the morning paper. She wiped her toes with the edge of her robe before going inside. She neatly folded the paper, poured her husband's coffee, adding exactly one-and-a-half teaspoons of sugar and headed for their bedroom.

Kyle was watching cartoons in the living room, his face a foot away from the screen, as always. Dora set the paper and coffee down and scooted him back several feet. Kyle scooched forward.

"If you get any closer, I'll turn it off," she said.

Brandon was in the downstairs bathroom practicing shaving or doing something else boys his age do. She tapped on the locked door as she passed. "Hurry it up in there. Kyle needs to shower."

Dora put Harvey's coffee on the vanity in the master bathroom and the newspaper in the magazine rack next to the toilet. She laid out his underwear and socks. Gave his shoes a quick polish with the shoe brush, then selected his suit, shirt and tie for today. "Time to get up, Sweetheart." She bent over her sleeping husband and kissed his cheek. "Don't forget the kids are going to your sister's after school. Stop and pick them up on your way home."

"Things better get back to normal around here pretty damn soon," Harvey growled as his feet hit the floor.

Back in the kitchen, she poured two small glasses of apple juice, two bowls of Fruit Loops for her sons and set the milk on the table. "Come and get it,"

she yelled as she peeled and sliced Harvey's grapefruit and started to fix his two scrambled eggs and one slice of whole grain toast.

She dropped the boys off at school and watched until they were inside the building. Kyle acting like a goof-ball, pushing and shoving both boys and girls. It made her feel ashamed. He was easily the biggest kid in his class. And he was a bully.

Brandon walked straight and stiff without a hint of a smile, his entire demeanor announcing superiority. He took after his father that way.

When they were babies Harvey ignored them as much as possible, and they needed her. She held them, nursed them, cuddled them and blew on their little bellies to make them giggle. At age three, Harvey decided to take over with Brandon and teach him what it was to become a man. It happened even earlier with Kyle. They were not allowed to cry. She was not allowed to comfort them. Yet, how could she fault any of it. Her sons were both superior athletes and academically at the top of their classes. Brandon never bothered to hide the fact he didn't like her. She didn't particularly like him either. Still, she felt nostalgic this morning, wishing she could have another baby, perhaps a little girl.

Dora stopped at the bank. The beauty salon next door had a sign in the window 'Walk-ins Welcome – No Appointment Needed'. She had her waist length dark brown hair cut short and dyed *Forbidden Fire Red*. Her next stop was at the mall where she bought a pair of designer jeans, a western shirt and a pair of cowboy boots. She changed in the mall's restroom and left her skirt, blouse and tennis shoes in the trash.

She wasn't sure quite when she made the decision but it was after her gynecologist diagnosed cervical cancer. After the out-patient laser surgery. She

hadn't mentioned it to Harvey or the boys. She told them she had the flu and spent two days in bed recuperating. They were annoyed with their disrupted lives and only moderately appreciative when things got back to normal. Perhaps that was when she decided. Or maybe it was the day her doctor told her it appeared they'd gotten it early enough and she no longer had symptoms.

It hadn't been difficult to find Manuel. She hadn't grown up in the best of neighborhoods.

He was waiting for her when she pulled into Denny's parking lot across from the Dodge dealer at noon. She gave him the cash and sat in her car while Manuel negotiated the purchase of the truck.

Manuel explained what she'd need to do to get the title and registration and handed her a new social security card and driver's license. Casey Wells, age thirty-two, five-foot-six, one-twenty pounds, red hair, brown eyes.

She looked at the clock on the dashboard. Five-forty-five. Harvey would be at his sister's by now, or maybe even on his way home. She pulled into a gas station and filled the Dodge Ram.

Casey stepped up into the cab of the truck, slipped a Sheryl Crow disc into the player, turned up the volume and belted out *Run, Baby, Run* as she accelerated.

The End