

## ***Black Ice Deleted Chapter: Mable and the Laundry***

***Author's Note:*** *This is a deleted chapter from "Black Ice" that I ended up not using.*

*I wanted readers to sympathize with May, Tom's wife, and this makes her sound too weak and indecisive. Originally, May was going to be named "Mable," and this would be the opening chapter of the book. Mable is cleaning her house and all of her clothes as she prepares to commit suicide. She assumes Tom has left her and can't deal with the loss. I hope you enjoy this.*

—Greg

It would be a beautiful suicide.

She walked around her bedroom, tidying the piles of clothes and linens on her bed. Laundry day was always like this, but this time it was busier than usual. She was making sure every scrap of fabric and every piece of clothing in the house was clean. After she was gone, all of these things would go to someone's home, or her friends at the church would box things up for the need, and Mable wanted to make sure everything was clean. How she kept house was still a reflection on her, even if half the town despised her.

The rest of the house was clean and tidy—she'd planned everything out. She'd even washed all the rugs with the steam cleaner she rented from the Kroger up in Troy—the wake would be here, she assumed, and everyone would be talking about her and her floors and she wanted them to be spotless. The steamer had taken up all the old stains like magic, making Mable wonder why she hadn't steamed the carpets long ago.

With Tom gone, it just didn't seem worth it—the man had been as clumsy as an oaf, and there was no point trying to keep things clean. Now, with him gone, there just didn't seem to be a point.

She missed him dearly.

Mable shook her head and got back to work, her mind falling again into the same rut—without Tom around, why was she here? He had left, disappeared. The town had felt sorry for her for a while, an emotion that

she despised, but now he'd been gone so long that the pity had gone away and now all she was left with was pity, something she hated even more. What was the point, really, of sticking around? Mable was just tired, so tired of the looks and the sad faces and the pats on her hands when she went to church. Everyone felt sorry for her, and she hated it.

It was so cold outside, and the snow just kept coming and coming, and with Merle gone, she just didn't care anymore.

But she wasn't leaving the place dirty.

Mabel had maybe another day or two to get everything ready, and then she'd be finished. Her plan was a simple one—they would find her in a silent repose, sleeping in her bed, happy and gone. She would be wearing her best nightgown, and the note would explain everything. Her nicest dress, the yellow one with the white lace around the shoulders, had just come back from the cleaners and now hung in a clear bag from the closet door.

It was the dress she wanted to be buried in.

The phone rang. Mable shook her head and went to answer it.

"Yes?" She listened to the person on the other end, her other hand playing with the long spiral cord. She'd never gotten around to getting a fancy cordless phone, and now she'd never need to. "Yes, that sounds fine. Thank you," she said and hung up, going back to her folding.

"Dumb people," she said to herself. "Of course I'm not interested in getting the paper. Why would I pay for something I'm not going to use?" It had been that weird woman Meredith, the one who always wore her sunglasses even at night. She ran the paper and sold ads and did the layout and still, somehow, managed to have time to call up subscribers to get them to renew. Mabel had heard the Meredith woman had something wrong with her eyes, something called photophobia, but that just made it sound like she was scared of light. Not allergic to it or something.

Tom had gotten the paper, but now they just stacked up in the corner until she took them out to the recycling on Thursdays. She never read the papers—after Tom left, it seemed like it was nothing but bad news: first it had been the breathless speculation about Tom, and then that horrible kidnapping of those two girls. Thank god they'd found them. Mable had let the papers pile up unread ever since.

She was re-washing all of her summer clothes and folding them before packing them back in the large plastic box marked "Summer." Tom had gotten these and helped her organize their clothes—they had summer and winter and switched them out as needed. She still needed to finish washing all of Tom's summer stuff—she hadn't been able to give it all away, so the

clothes were still there even though he'd disappeared back in August. Time had passed and he'd not returned, but she still hadn't been able to force herself to get angry enough at him to give his clothes away.

Her few friends would have laughed at her for the sentiment—everyone knew Tom was a cheater. He'd cheated on Mable more than a few times, and sometimes he was less than discrete. She knew that he had women on the side, and hated herself for being okay with it. She knew she should be angry, but she had loved him so much, it almost made up for it.

They had talked about it endlessly—he'd said that the other women didn't mean anything, and that she was his only one true love, but she didn't buy it. Her theory was that you spent time in your life on what was important to you: if kids are important, you spend time with them. For Tom, running around on Mable had been important to him, more important than spending time with her. They'd come close to splitting up several times, but Tom had always convinced her to stay.

But now he was gone, and everyone in town assumed he'd finally gotten tired of Mable and run off to California or somewhere. And the pitiful looks she got—well, Mable was about fed up with them.

She finished her summer clothes and packed them back into the large plastic box and she wondered where the clothes would end up. She and Tom had never gotten around to having any kids, so there were no kids or grandkids to take them. The folks at her church would take care of them, another reason Mabel wanted everything clean. She didn't want people talking about her after she was gone, and she certainly didn't want people to think she couldn't keep house.

All of Tom's winter clothes were done—she'd spent a week washing and folding and packing away everything. All the linens were done now, and she was just finishing up hers and Tom's summer clothes. The last few loads would be made up of her winter clothes, things she was currently using. After that, everything would be ready.

And it would be beautiful, she hoped. She'd read on-line about suicides and the easiest, least painful way to do it. Pills seemed like the right way for her, quick and easy and painless. She couldn't imagine jumping off of something—not that there was anything tall enough in Cooper's Mill to jump off of—or using a gun or something. The websites she'd visited said that suicides were different between men and women—men usually went for something dramatic, while women, ever more practical, went for something simple—and painless.

Maybe that's what happened to Tom—no one had ever heard from him. Maybe he'd driven out into the woods and offed himself—but wouldn't they

have found him by now? Or his car? Tom had just up and gone, without a word to her or his work buddies or his circle of coffee friends at the coffee shop. He'd meet them every day like clockwork, and then suddenly he was just gone.

And it had been six months and she was just done. Done with the questions, done with the sad looks in peoples' eyes. Done with everyone wondering what she must have done to Tom—or not done—to make him leave and disappear. Done with the looks of false sympathy, of people looking like they cared but not really caring.

She was just done.