

Sam Campbell

The Anatomy of I'm Sorry

She didn't know how to say she was sorry, so she did the dishes for him. She scraped dried bits of carrot and broccoli out of salad bowls and scrubbed the brown gunk from the bottom of the pan that had seared uneaten steak. When she was done, she dried the plates and knives and forks and placed them into their designated spots. By the time she was finished, nothing was out of place, but nothing was right yet, so she needed to do more. So she did his laundry. She gathered up his underwear and socks, his work uniform and his old T-shirt that she still thought needed to be thrown away. She sorted them by color, by quality, by whether or not they'd had a fight when he was wearing them. She used extra detergent in those.

She didn't know how to say she was sorry, so she bought him gifts. Some were small, inexpensive things. Records that weren't yet in his collection; books to be stacked on top of the books she bought him last time, that he still hasn't read; a photo album full of pictures from before the fallout, to remind him. Others were expensive, luxurious gifts that she knew she couldn't afford but felt she couldn't afford not to, either. A massage chair, black and looming in their living room, to knead and pummel the tension away; Egyptian cotton sheets, in fancy-sounding colors like ecru and taupe. A giant, gaudy neon sign of a woman's silhouette, because doesn't every man want one of those for his man cave?

She didn't know how to say she was sorry, so she tried using words. She couldn't find any of her own, so she bought some from other people. She bought a funny one, with a lollipop on the front that read, "I suck; I'm sorry." and a cute one, with a picture of a dog sporting the best puppy dog eyes that said, "I'm doggone sorry." and a sincere one, which had no pictures and just said, "Please accept my apology with deepest sincerity."

Nothing she did seemed to have any impact. The dishes and laundry were just dirtied again and again. The gifts were used, or not, depending on his mood. The apology cards sat unopened on his desk, or the kitchen table, and one was still on the floor where it fell and no one picked it up. She just didn't know how to say she was sorry.