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Marital Harmony

‘Smile, it may never happen!’ A girl said cheerily as I walked down the road towards the bus stop. I was so wrapped up in my own thoughts that I didn’t get a chance to respond to her; although even if I did have a chance it may have been a false response. There’s no need to be rude though. Anyway, I have more important things to think about than being polite to some stranger on the road. Little did that girl know that ‘it’ may have already happened...

‘Oh, come on Charlie, just one more drink. Don’t be such a killjoy’. Rupert was always up for ‘one more drink’ and then another one and even another after that. Well, I had nothing much to go home to so I decided to stay and have that other drink. There were many such evenings like this one after work. That was our pattern, me and the lads going down to our local to have a few drinks before heading off home...

I work in an office with a nice bunch of lads. It’s a funny sort of office because there are no women but it seems to work well and everyone gets on with their job and we all have laughs in between. We provide computer support to different companies so if anyone is having

problems they give us a ring and we take lots of calls and help to rectify their technical problems. Yes, it's as easy as that. If only everything in life could be as easy.

Most of the lads seemed to have good lives, or at least lives that they were content with. They all lived at home with their girlfriends or wives and when they went home there would be a nice dinner waiting for them. Some had kids and wouldn't come out for a drink after work so often but everyone respected that because we were all pretty decent like that. I was the odd one out. At home I had a wife, yes. Did she put dinner on the table for me? Yes, she'd do that sometimes but I wouldn't get any peace at home. All she did was nag, nag, nag. I mean, she literally wouldn't stop moaning. It sometimes got so bad that I would drink more at home and then we would have arguments. Sometimes these were very loud and she would throw things and I would have to hold myself back from doing something I would regret...

So, as you can see, life wasn't that great at home. I think she had a problem you see. She was messed up. Her whole family were and she was on a whole load of pills which she got from her doctor. She also spent some time in hospital for her tantrums. Once she was in hospital and they wouldn't let her out. I never took that much interest in what was actually wrong with her. It was one of those things where you think you're in love and then you get married quickly before thinking about the consequences and the fact that your girlfriend is a nutter.

'One more drink it is then Rupert mate', I said jovially. Why not? No harm in it.

'So what you having for tea tonight, Eric', John asked me.

'I don't know. We might get a takeaway'. I knew that from the row we'd had this morning I was unlikely to get anything for my tea.

'Why don't you cook something for her? A romantic dinner for two!' I suppose there was something in what John said. It might placate her and improve our relationship which was

going down the toilet fast. I decided to leave the pub quickly after downing my drink. I said goodbye to the lads and headed off to the supermarket to get a few things before getting the bus. In the supermarket I bought different vegetables which we wouldn't ordinarily have had. I contemplated a nice bottle of wine but thought better of it considering that we both drank rather too much and a lot of our arguments probably stemmed from that. I decided, instead, on a nice cream cake. For once, I was quite looking forward to going home and making us both something nice to eat. I knew that we had some candles and I decided that we would sit at the table properly and eat rather in front of the telly as we usually did.

'I'm home love', I called, as I opened the front door. Silence. Maybe she's popped out, although it was unusual because she was always home by this time. Lizzie worked in the local Marks and Spencer and she loved it there. I suppose it was the same as me with my job. I decided to get on with making dinner and surprise her for when she got back from wherever she had gone. I put the radio on and started to peel the vegetables. I was quite enjoying this. I hadn't really done any cooking but had watched some cookery programmes on telly. Maybe this would be a new chapter in our relationship and we could be happy, I thought positively. Something strange had come over me and I felt quite happy for a change.

I put the vegetables in the oven and watched the moon from the kitchen window as I waited for them to roast. There was a strange tranquillity about the place which I hadn't noticed before because of Lizzie's constant moaning. I suppose I could do more to pull my weight and cook dinner sometimes and stay in with her. I began to think that I hadn't really been a very good husband after all and maybe it wasn't all her fault. I was now looking forward to her walking through the door. I was going to give her a big hug. I never did that. She would be surprised all right. She would smile and we would eat dinner in peace for a change.

I looked at the clock. Eight o'clock. Where was she? I tried calling her mobile and it rang. I heard it ringing in the house...my heart suddenly started racing. I could hear it in my ears. I sprinted up the stairs into the bedroom and there on our bed was her mobile. How come she hadn't taken it with her? She always takes it everywhere with her. I called her friends from her workplace. She only had two friends there. They were friends she used to talk to on her mobile in the evenings.

'Hello, Jill? This is Eric, Lizzie's husband'.

'Oh, Eric, hello, how are you? How is Lizzie?' She sounded concerned.

'She's fine. Well, you saw her today at work didn't you?' I asked. There was a pause before Jill answered,

'Lizzie's not been at work for a few weeks now Eric...' I sat down on the bed.

'What do you mean Jill? Panic was setting in. What was going on here?

'Lizzie resigned, Eric. Didn't you know?' I hung up. Of course I didn't know she had resigned. She had been telling me that she was at work and nothing had been different. Nothing had been different. Oh Lizzie...had she run away? The wife I couldn't stand to come home to. The woman who did my head in every single day of my life. The arguments, the abuse, the broken crockery...but we were still husband and wife. We were still a married couple. We still ate our dinner every evening together albeit in silence. My wife, my Lizzie. Where was she? Where had she gone? I stood up and went to her wardrobe. I was too afraid to open it. Eventually I did and what I saw didn't surprise me. It was empty. She had taken most of her things. The things she had left were things I had bought her over the years.

The day when I thought our lives could change forever was the day my Lizzie had decided to walk out on me. The arguments, the lack of support, my disinterest in our marriage

had taken its toll and had been too much for her. Why had she not told me, though? Why did she have to run away like that? She was the one who had been constantly moaning. Wasn't she? I mean, I hadn't been a bad husband. I admit I'd hit her once or twice but then most men do that, don't they? I mean, she had bruises but she never had to go to hospital and we had both been arguing...

And so, it had already happened. It's now been five months since Lizzie walked out on me. When she left she took the light with her. My Lizzie. The woman I married. Today I am a shadow of the man I once was. I never appreciated my Lizzie. Now she is gone forever and all I feel is pain and regret.

NEKOPIRATI

A Mother's Love

It was almost time. She could feel the baby moving and knew that he wanted to get out in the open, into the world. A new being in the world, a new beginning...

She knew that she would get some help to deliver her baby. She had done this before five times in five years. To carry her babies was a hopeful experience but she learned that nothing was perfect and the pain of loss would always follow. She pushed. The pain was excruciating. She could feel warm liquid oozing out of her and trickling down her legs. After much pushing, which came natural to her (she'd had practice) the baby came out. He was covered in the membrane still and there was blood which she started to clean.

She revelled in the beauty of her baby boy. He was so soft and warm and his smell was beautiful, of sweet innocence. She nudged him, caressed him, fed him, kept him warm, whispered sounds of comfort to him. He was happy, warm, fed, loved. Innocent eyes. They enjoyed being close to each other, mother and baby. Three days of bliss. There were voices outside, talking and laughter. Then it happened. They came in, two of them, and snatched her baby from her, pulling him by his leg. He screamed, the look of terror in his face just too much to bear. She also screamed, a lamenting and haunting sound which, if anyone with a heart had heard, would be impossible to forget.

She never saw her baby again. She didn't know what became of him. The pain of separation was excruciating. Every day she grieved and longed for her babies. She knew that others were also in the same position as her. She also knew that this would not be the last time. They would come again and rape her. She would carry her baby and then they would take it away after a few days. The first time this happened she was in such shock that she expected her baby to be brought back to her, but she never saw him again. The second time she feared the same thing would happen. The third time she knew what would happen. Eventually, she would get too old and they would also drag her away and torture her even more and her pathetic life would end. But then this is the life of millions like her. Will this ever end? The terror and horror experienced by her kind.

This is the life of a cow.

Secret Despair

The room was bright and airy. A light breeze entered the window and delicately moved the lace curtain. The playfulness of the waltz, a contrast to the silent figure sitting at the table. There was no movement except that of the music, three beats to a bar...the woman gazed at the bright pink carnations in the vase on her table, yet she didn't appear to be looking at the flowers but somehow beyond – not beyond the flowers but as if she were gazing into a different world, perhaps a different life. Her nails meticulously painted blood red and her fingers were decorated with colourful rings on three fingers of both hands. Her left hand supported her chin as her fingers gently touched her cheek, her face in silent repose. Her colourful rings were a reflection of the jovial dress she wore. Dangling earrings begged movement but were stationary. She could smell the scent of jasmine which she had applied delicately behind her ears and on her slender ivory wrists.

Her other hand caressed a photograph frame which lay on the table in front of her. Within the frame was a picture of a man who gazed at her from eternally youthful eyes. Hers, despite some youth, were aging with every second that passed and would continue to age while his would remain forever young. The radiogram played a waltz. It was uninterrupted by anything in the room and oblivious of the cup of tea which had just been thrown against the whitewashed wall and which had been rudely disturbed by the dirty brown liquid – broken crockery lay on the wooden floor beneath. Tranquil composure and apparent serenity hid despair. Eyes apparently calm now glassy and struggling. The windows of the soul threatened to open their curtains. A storm had been brewing and lightening had struck to the detriment of the wall and the cup but maybe it was better that way...then came the rain which left two rivulets that threatened the mask. Two rivers of sadness. Had a dam broken?

The music ended. If one had been in the room there would have been no sound but from within the woman there was a silent scream which could never be heard by anyone. It could never be seen by anyone. She couldn't let it. She stroked her hair which was piled high on her head and rose. As she walked towards the mirror on the wall she glanced at the destruction she had caused. Had she done that? Taking her handkerchief from her sleeve she patted her face and then went to the ruined wall. She bent down to pick up the crockery. No one would know what had just taken place in the room in the space of a few minutes. She would clean the wall. The wall would be immaculate as would she. Would she?

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