

Her eyelids were so heavy. She licked her lips, the metallic taste of stale wine exploded on her tongue, urgh! She could feel the damp pillow where her saliva had pooled; she struggled to raise her head. The dogs were barking loudly, shit, she was late waking. She let her head slump back onto the soggy pillow and closed her eyes.

She slowly peeled her eyelids open; she lay on her back staring at the ceiling. Why couldn't he have just fed the fucking dogs? They were his pets, if he loved them then? She felt bile rise into her mouth. Grasping the damp sweat soaked sheet she pulled herself up.

What else did she expect? She already did everything else around the house, all the cooking, cleaning, everything; her arms sagged under the weight of her responsibilities. The Dobermans were howling now, didn't that infernal noise annoy him? He would consider it as acting on principle; he would refuse to feed them, that was 'her' job, like everything else. Being his Carer meant being his dogsbody. Her head pounded as she focused on remaining vertical.

The flowers on her pyjamas swayed slowly then started to spin. She might vomit. She squeezed her eyes closed and considered the party. Her beloved husband had been in a bad mood as usual, he hadn't wanted to attend the party, after all they were 'her college friends'. Madeleine had agreed that's why she had wanted to go alone but that stopped all discussion, he would go with her. Once there he would cough painfully in the corner, arranged as a tableau of martyrdom and they would pamper him, considering her selfish making such a sick man come to a party. She had dressed calmly, they didn't know the real him, no one did. Even she had been surprised at his violent and sadistic nature. She had worn her lilac dress the one that emphasised her slender waist and hips; she had wanted to look her best, to pretend he didn't exist.

Philip hadn't aged well. The loss of his hair and his thick waist had been a shock, but he still had his smile; it was still the handsome appealing face of his youth. Madeleine had dated him for a year or so at university, they had been good together, but just not good enough. The future was wide and open with mountains to climb and horizons to aim for; she had been young. With several decades hindsight his annoying mannerisms had been the consequence of his love her. His obsessive phone calls, appearing suddenly without warning at her flat were because he hated to be separated from her. This had been too much for her to bear; she wanted to be free so she broke off the idyllic romance. That was the irony; she had brushed him aside to run head long into a passionate affair with an abuser.

Madeleine stared at her long pale fingers; they trembled slightly as she remembered Philip's hand encasing them as he softly kissed her cheek.

"You still look as beautiful as the very first time I saw you."

His breath had brushed her ear lobe and that's when she made her decision, in that second she had decided to leave her husband. She was beautiful, Philip had confirmed it and she was living as a virtual slave with a man who beat her. The problem was no one would believe that a man in a wheel chair would raise his hand and slap her, punch her, psychologically abuse her. They would be puzzled, couldn't she just walk away? After all he was immobile; surely she was just being cruel to suggest such a thing.

It had started gradually, after the first miscarriage; he had constantly reminded her of that, of her failure, as a woman and as a mother. She had been initially too distressed to argue, to shout back; after all it was true wasn't it? Then came the physical violence, as she remembered it and it was a vague shadowy thought now, she had been the first to raise her hand. She had slapped him. He had insulted and belittled her all day and she had lost her temper and there it was the licence to

hit back. Even after his heart attack he had continued with the abuse, using the dogs as protection when she considered retaliation. Terry had sat in his wheelchair controlling her life and Madeleine played the part of the devoted carer. Only the two of them knew the real truth, that the coronary was caused by his frenzy to reach her and that her injuries weren't because he had fallen on her but because he liked to beat her. Terry liked the feel of her bruised flesh in his hands, to see the dried blood on her face, he had boasted to her about that. Before his attack the doctor had suggested tests, she shouldn't fall so much at such a young age, the bruises on the face stopped then.

Madeleine heaved herself to standing.

09:40

She shuffled to the bathroom and urinated, getting up from the toilet made her head swim. The cold water helped revitalise her face a little, the dark shadows under her eyes made her skin look grey. She had drunk too much; it was the simple delight in her freedom, she had made the decision and it would all be over today, when she felt better. Friends always stayed close to the injured party, she would be alone, and she accepted that as an inevitable consequence of her actions.

Her plan was to feed the dogs and then maybe sleep a little more; she slowly headed for the stairs and shuffled down each step. At the bottom she waited for the world to stop spinning sitting on the third step up waiting. Her feet were bare. Terry hated to see her feet free of restraint, she loved to feel the carpet pile squash between her toes; Philip had been known to suck them. Madeleine smiled at that thought, after breakfast she would paint her nails, fingers and toes. She felt full of confidence at her new life, she always did when she was alone, then he would arrive and laugh at her feeble attempts to exert influence. The house was modified for his disability, therefore she would be forced to leave, leave her home. They wouldn't make him sell it, she would receive nothing until he died and she would lose her income and what else could she do? What else was she good for? He would laugh at her indignation and have another drink and the cycle would start again.

But not this time, Philip had said she was 'beautiful' and even though she knew that was untrue, she didn't care. Describing someone as 'plain' just didn't sound as romantic and maybe now, with some attention to her hair, maybe she could pass for attractive. At least Philip had lied to make her happy and perhaps in some small way he even believed it to be true.

Madeleine walked into the kitchen and stared at his body lying on the floor. His head was hidden inside the fridge door. Every morning at 7:00 she would wake and prepare his breakfast, at 08:00 he would take his medication. He had been unable to or been too stubborn to wake her and his refusal to change his routine had caused him to endeavour to make his own breakfast, he had opened the fridge and then. She stared at his body, any number of things could have happened, the cat might have tripped him, the floor may have been wet, he may have just stumbled as he tried to stand. She cautiously opened the fridge door. His head rested on the rim. She could see the blood spilling into her clean fridge. That would need stitches at least. She knew by past experiences when casualty was required. He lay still, she let the door go and it banged once on his head, she liked the dull solid sound as the door clipped his skull, then she stepped back and moved quietly to the living room. She sat in his favourite chair, the sun was too weak to make the room warm at this time, and she felt chilly.

Madeleine stared at the clock.

09:58

She smiled. It was Tuesday, the respite Carer would arrive at 11:00 to prepare the lunch. She rose steadily and climbed the stairs. She stretched out across the bed and relaxed, the dogs had stopped

09:00

Sanna Ambersen

howling now, she turned onto her side and drifted back to sleep.