

Plat Du Jour

So...so it's here. The time has arrived. She has thought this through a thousand times. Can she do it? The questions ping around in her head but, if not now, when? Will there be another chance and, if that other chance comes, will she be as ready as she is now?

She knows the room with her eyes closed. To confirm this thought, she closes her eyes and pictures it; just the room, an empty room with no-one slumped carelessly in the corner chair slurping air through pierced lips.

The crystal white walls are now tinged with the beige of his nicotine and the carpet is scragged bare, unable to defend itself against time and neglect. The dining table, which was new two years ago, is about to be repossessed and is covered with tabloid newspapers all exposed to the racing pages.

She wrinkles her nose at the dirty smell lingering in the room where he could not be bothered to...to just go someplace else. The television is on, the picture fractured and fuzzy. Some news item about bank rates and dividends, like something from another planet, is blaring. She leans over and turns the sound down. Everyone else in the street has a controller which you just aim, but this house is absent of such things. She moves her finger and points it at the body in the corner. "Bang!" She blows invisible smoke away from her eyes.

At this moment, everything is going to plan; a plan that has evolved over many weeks and been subject to many postponements. It was always going to be a Thursday night because, for the last few months, Thursday nights have been spent down at Bingo with the girls. "Oh, the sheer tedium of those nights and with it the pretence, the lying and deceit of this plat du jour.

She had to wait three weeks before Joan (it was always going to be Joan) asked the obvious question. "So, Lilly, George doesn't mind you coming out of a night then?"

"No, he's all for it." (A lie.)

"That's nice to hear."

"Yeah, he thinks it's great that I get out on my own." (A bigger lie.)

"Good." (Joan does not believe a word of it.)

"We're getting on better than ever now." (If only.)

Three pairs of eyes scan her face and neck, looking for the telltale cuts, bruises and scratches. She leans forward and lowers her voice.

"Since we started sleeping in separate rooms, we really seem to get on so much better."

The task of leaning forward has stretched the skin around her ribs and she stifles back a moan. The other three women are intrigued at being allowed this far inside number 93 Tenby Street.

"Our - you know what," she winks, "is better than ever." (God, what an almighty lie!)

The other three giggle like little children and try to remember what it used to be like to enjoy sex. All three quickly decide they would rather not think about it.

“Yes, he sleeps in the front and I sleep in the box room at the back. Should have done it years ago.”

That particular conversation was six weeks ago and, by now, the other three, and all of the „other threes“ they in turn confide in, believe her story. Joan has even tried moving to the spare room herself but Bill was having “none of that modern malarkey.”

So here we are. George is sitting in the chair, his eyes squeezed and blank, his face yellow and stained with tears, trying to tell her about the tight pain screwing into his chest. He needs her help. She wonders: does he guess there’s been something different about his pills today? Should she give him the chance to say he’s sorry? Sorry for the thirty years in which he has treated her like an animal. She walks towards him, smiles and says, “Are you OK, George? Is there anything I can do?”

His eyes distend as he cannot fail to read the hate in her eyes. He is unable to move as she takes the lighter fluid bottle from the fireplace and dribbles it thoughtfully down his shirt before scooping up the newspapers from the table, soaking them with the rest of the lighter fluid and spilling them at his feet. Her eyes lock into his as she takes a cigarette from his pack of twenty and forces it into his mouth.

Delicately, oh so delicately, she strikes the match before hissing in his ear, “Night-night, George. I think I’ll sleep in the back room tonight. Is that alright with you, my love?”