

The Blanket

Mary Jo stared at her reflection. Her cheek throbbed where Michael had slammed her face against the wall. Her eye was already beginning to turn purple and green, again. Her chin quivered as she fought to keep the tears from falling.

Why, she asked herself. Why had the man she adored become such a monster? She remembered the first time Michael had struck her; it was in the limo as they left their wedding. He had become incensed because the rice provided by the caterers was not tinted as he had requested. So, he had slapped her. She had been astonished. The anger, the slap, they were both so unexpected. That was only the beginning of what Mary Jo came to realize was the 'normal' behavior for her husband of almost two years.

What in the world was she going to do? It seemed that nothing she did pleased Michael. Mary Jo buried her face in her hands and wept. Suddenly she felt something brush against her leg. It felt almost like a dog. But, of course, it could not be. Michael had taken her tiny poodle to the animal shelter the day after their marriage began. She was powerless to prevent his putting to sleep the little animal she had shared her life with before she met Michael. He had slapped her that time too as she stood weeping and begging him not to destroy Mitzi.

Mary Jo gazed around the room. The only thing she saw was the blanket emblazoned with wolves. That blanket was what had caused Michael to hit her this morning before he left for work. Last night he had slapped, and more than once her because he didn't like the new, fleecy yellow blanket she had put on their bed. After berating her,

slapping her and leaving her alone weeping in their bedroom Michael had stormed out the door to the car.

Mary Jo did not know where he had spent the night. Michael was gone until 5 this morning when he returned carrying the new, unwrapped blanket. Mary Joe could not believe what she saw. It was covered with pictures of heads of wolves. She had eyed the blanket in dismay when Michael announced that his bed was to reflect a 'man' in the house. Her silent protest had been enough to begin the all too familiar onset of his rage.

Michael had stormed and shouted. He tore the blankets and sheets from the bed and left them strewn around the room. He had pulled the curtains from the windows and swept everything from her dresser top. She watched in silence as he crushed the small bottle of cologne her mother had sent to her for her birthday with his heel. She said nothing as he dumped the bath powder from the box and kicked the container across the room. He ripped the head from the stuffed toy her father gave her. Then he had turned upon Mary Jo herself. In silence she had borne the beating.

At last with his anger assuaged Michael had showered, kissed her good bye and set off for work. It had taken Mary Jo nearly the whole of the morning to repair the damage Michael had caused to the bedroom. She had taken the clear plastic wrapper from the wolfish blanket with a shudder. Every eye seemed to be trained upon her.

As Mary Jo worked to ready their bedroom for Michael's inspection she had found herself stopping often to look at the blanket. Once as she was working she was positive she had seen a movement from the corner of her eye. When she turned only the eyes of the wolves had stared back at her. "I'm cracking up," she said in a low voice.

And now as she stood gazing at her battered countenance Mary Jo had the uncomfortable feeling that wolves were all watching her. And she was afraid to glance down and see what it was she might be feeling there against her leg. Mary Jo stood trembling for a long while before whatever it was disappeared.

She picked up the list Michael had left for her. It was the chores he expected to find completed when he returned from work. Mary Jo glanced at the clock. "Oh Lord," she breathed, "I'll never get it all done." From the door Mary Jo cast a last glance at the bed covered over with the wolf head blanket. In disbelief she watched as one of the wolf heads suddenly opened it's mouth in a huge yawn. She rushed down the stairs. This just could not be happening.

Mary Jo hurried to wash Michael's blue shirt and pants. She baked the pie using fresh apples as he ordered and rearranged the linens in the bathroom. It was almost time for Michael to return. Mary Jo dreaded returning to their bedroom and the blanket she found so unnerving; but she knew she must. She had not had time to change Michael's socks and underwear drawers again for the third time this week. Why did he keep doing this to her? On Monday he had ordered the socks be put in the top drawer and his underwear in the one below. Tuesday he had wanted his T shirts in the top drawer with his socks on the bottom. And now he wanted his underwear in the top drawer and the socks in the one below.

Each day she moved the garments, each day he found reason to dislike the arrangement, each day he beat her.

Mary Jo cast a timorous glance toward the bed as she entered the room she shared with the husband she feared and was coming to hate. Every eye seemed to follow her as she dashed to the dresser. She didn't have enough time. She never had enough time to get it all done. Mary Jo had just removed the T shirts from the top drawer when she

heard Michael's car coming into the garage.

Mary Jo began trembling. The roast was in the oven, the pie was baked, she had made the salad and the bread. But it would not matter. She had not gotten this dresser redone and Michael would use that as an excuse to beat her again.

She heard Michael striding along the hallway. Frantic with worry she threw the underwear into the top drawer and grabbed for the socks. Oh No. The blanket on the bed was bunched and lumpy. Michael was sure to be angry about that. The more she tried to straighten the covering the more lumpy it appeared. Mary Jo nearly screamed when one wolf licked her hand. Mary Jo snatched the T shirts off the bed just as Michael came into the room.

His eyes swept over her and the blanket. Dark fury covered his face. Without a word he took a step toward her. Mary Jo backed away from him. They both heard the low growls begin at the same moment. "Where is that dog?" Michael shouted. Mary Jo stood mute shaking her head. "Don't lie to me. I know you have a dog in here. I can hear it. Thought you could pull one over on me huh? First I'll take care of it and then I'll take care of you." Rage filled his voice as Michael rushed to look under the bed. The growls became louder.

Mary Jo dashed past Michael to the door just as the blanket tumbled from the bed and onto Michael's kneeling form. With a curse ending in a shriek Michael fell thrashing to the rug. Mary Jo turned at the door to see if Michael might be coming after her. She stared in amazement as wolf after wolf rose from the blanket to attack Michael. Blood poured from wounds on his arms and hands. One wolf gnawed on Michael's leg. "Help me," he implored as a huge wolf lunged for his throat. Two wolves began ripping Michael's arm from his body.

Mary Jo fled to the stairs. After a time the sounds of Michael's shrieks and the growling of the feeding wolves ceased. Trembling and fearful Mary Jo crept up the stairs. There on the bed was the smooth blanket emblazoned with heads of wolves. On the floor lay Michael, Mary Jo was astounded to find no trace of the blood or savage attack she had seen was borne on Michael's inert body.

The autopsy showed Michael had died of a heart attack.

As Mary Jo sat on the sofa cuddling the new tiny poodle she ran a hand over the pictured head of a nearby wolf imprinted on the blanket covering the couch. She smiled, she was safe and Michael most certainly did not die of a heart attack.

copyright 2001 molly martin

<http://ebooks.addr.com/mysterythriller.html>