

The Man Who Falls In Love With His Wife — Bruce Deitrick Price - Kobo

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I

September

Chapter 1) September 8

John Franklin unbuttoned his shirt, thinking about a worthless case he had taken on that afternoon. He glanced at himself in the oval mirror over his dresser, mugged through a few grimaces. I look, he thought, like the other side is winning.

He tossed the pin-striped shirt on a chair and slapped his lean face with both hands, the way men do after putting on aftershave. *Come on, John, let's look alive here.*

From down the hall he heard his wife speaking to one of the children. "No, you may not. But you already know that. Now go on back to bed." He loved the way she handled them. A frown, a nudge, a smile. She had this unusual gift for making them do what she wanted; and they liked it.

Elizabeth came in the bedroom, closed the door. "John, darling." She moved behind him, her chin on his shoulder, and circled her arms strongly around his bare chest. They looked at each other in the mirror.

"How's our sick boy?" he asked.

"He'll be fine. And how is this boy?" Her face was beside his, he could feel the warmth of her skin, smell perfume.

John made a big grim smile at her. "I look beat, right? Maybe we're working too much."

Elizabeth laughed in surprise. "I'm afraid that is your fate, darling. If there's one thing you love, it's working too much."

"Okay, that settles it! Let's get away this weekend. How about Bermuda? Oh hell, beautiful downtown Newark."

Elizabeth kissed his neck. Her hands slid back and forth on his chest. "You look wonderful, sweetheart, top to bottom, front to back. I think we've got something with the Willetts...Yes, we did promise."

She leaned away from him and took off her blouse. He watched her shoulders shift, heard her clothes slide to the floor, the shoes kicked off.

"The way the agency's jumping," she went on in the cheerful, musical way she usually talked, "I'll be in on the weekend. I actually had a dream about the new detergent, I'm embarrassed to say, sort of a Busby Berkley thing in soap suds...And they sent me this accident-prone new secretary. 'I'm sorry I'm such a klutz,' she said. I almost told her, 'You and me, babe.' Never mind! I'm going to save her. As soon as I figure out how."

Elizabeth leaned on him again. He felt her breasts flatten warmly on his back. "Come on, lover, give a lady a drink." She took his arm and pulled him toward the small

table in the corner of the softly-lit bedroom. John had already set out a bottle of Courvoisier and two Steuben glasses. The Wednesday night scenario.

John filled the glasses, handed one to his wife. "To long hours."

"No, no--to us!" she declared, smiling. She drank a few swallows and sighed contentedly, almost a yawn.

They sat down, the chairs close together. John put his right arm around her, talked close to her face. "See? You're beat, too. We do need a vacation."

Elizabeth enjoyed the brandy for a moment. Then she twisted to look at him, to savor his strong, earnest face. Not a face that very many women called cute. She remembered thinking this the first time she saw him; and then thinking, perfect! "Let's just say I'm very, very relaxed. And ready for any indecency ...Well, almost!"

John turned the words in his mind; Elizabeth could always make words end up in the right place. She said no twice without saying no. "Fact is," he said, "I like it when you're tired. You get prettier somehow."

"You are the sweetest man. Don't worry, John, we'll get away. I'll take care of it." Elizabeth sipped some more, snuggling against him. Her head fell on his shoulder.

John heard her breathing change. From outside their windows he heard the shouts and rumble of the city, subsiding now toward midnight. A siren wailed up, then vanished. Cars hissed softly by twelve floors below, like the sound of something on fire. John filled his glass, drank some more, felt the heat snake along his arms. His mood felt odd to him, a little on edge. He glanced at Elizabeth's light brown hair, smooth and shiny, stared down at her breasts. Seventeen years, three children, and she had hardly changed at all.

Over the summer one of their friends said, "Your wife's hot, you're a lucky guy." Yes, he was sure it's true.

She's hot, I'm lucky. So what's bothering me?

Elizabeth started awake. She put both arms around him, stretched up to kiss his cheek, grinning. "Well, hello, sailor!"

John wanted to say something affectionate. Instead he said, "Well, we can skip it, if you want to."

She drew back, studying his face. That wasn't like John. "I'm here, darling." She held him with her left arm, her right hand sliding over his chest. "I'm right here."

"It is Wednesday," he joked, "we make love? Ready or not?"

"John ...?" She looked really surprised, maybe hurt. "I'm so sorry, baby. I'm all yours." She hugged him tighter, started kissing his ear and whispering to him. She often did this; suddenly John wasn't sure why. The children might be listening in the hall? Or because she could create this almost desperate intimacy. Sometimes she'd whisper, "I'll tell you what I'm thinking, then you tell me what you're thinking. First, I want to kiss..." Even as he felt aroused, a sort of guilt eased through him. What's the point of being negative? Abruptly John turned toward her, pressed his hand over her thighs. "E," he said, staring into her brown eyes, "I'm sorry. I was just thinking..." He smiled uncertainly. "E, you look wonderful. You really do."

Her eyes narrowed for an instant. Something about John's intensity caught at her. But she was relaxed, happy; horny, too. She let it go. Then she was smiling again, eagerly, almost girlishly. "John, John, John. Did I mention--recently--you're the best

husband imaginable?" She stood slowly and drew him up. "Now, how about putting me to bed?"

Elizabeth seemed extremely vulnerable, and very lovely. "That's a good plan," he said. She put her arms tightly around his neck. He straightened, lifting her several inches off the carpet. "Yes," he said, "I'd like to do just that."

Elizabeth giggled. "Got any wild ideas?"

"I'll think of something."

"You won't make me blush?"

"When did I ever do that?"

"Come on. Remember that time in..." and she whispered hotly in his ear.

end Chapter 1