

Gazing through the window over the fields and towards the church in the distance, a moments memory flicks into your mind, " A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle", goes the thought, you remember a white "t" shirt with a unicycle, no you correct yourself, a penny farthing; a black one. Another thought, and you smile, student days, happy days, not this shit, another "t" shirt, "First it's sink into his arms, then arms into his sink". Then of the friend who had read you wrong, you didn't hate men, just hadn't got to them, really yet, and you maybe did have a little crush on girls you admired, she had given you her copy of Radclyffe Hall's, "Well of Loneliness". Read it, quite enjoyed it and soon put her straight, you think, and laugh, straight she wasn't, you ask yourself where are those "t" shirts now? Long since discarded, or at your mothers forgotten in a box in a cupboard, funny how these pre-marriage memories are coming back to you. You cast your eyes down and look at the window sill in front of the sink and the lone goldfish circling its prison bowl, and down at the breakfast bowls in the sink that you are absent mindedly washing and stacking onto the drainer, "Well it's not gonna be your fucking sink soon, mate", you say out loud to no one. The kettle clicks off and you make yourself a mug of tea and walk through the sun room, open the patio doors, embrace fresh Cumbrian air, hear noises from cows and sheep in the fields, birds flying over and walk onto the patio and into the spring sunshine.

You walk a tour of the garden, the veg patch needs sorting, must get some seed potatoes, and onion sets, you think but you know you won't, the pond needs the winter leaves removing, when did all the moss and green stuff suddenly appear on the garden paths and the patio slabs? The brambles need cutting back, before they take over, it all needs a good tidy. You sit in a secluded part of the garden and sip your tea, this used to be your favourite, for its quietness and for the scent in summer when freshly watered, a small camomile lawn, stone chipping paths with low limestone walls enclosing your herbs, larger herbs such as angelica and lovage at the back. In the middle of the lawn is a bay tree, it was tall and clipped into a ball, beautiful, a joy and so useful but now its leaves are all brown, it hasn't come through winter, bit like you, you hope it'll come back to life but really it's dead inside.

You sit and look around the herb garden, all barren, all the herbs are dormant except for a few chives, the sweet cicely isn't up you think, yet either. You used to put so much effort into all your garden, constantly weeding, watering, cutting, planting, picking, reaping. Enjoying the colours, the scents, the wind in the chimes, the tinkling of the water features into the pond, the sound of children laughing. Sitting in the sunshine, clinking of wine glasses, family barbeques, parties with friends. All gonna be gone now. You notice a pile of leaves blown into a corner, they'll never get tidied up, and a tear wells in your eye. Extracting an unopened ten pack of silk cut and a lighter from your pocket, you turn them over in your hands and consider opening the cellophane again, yesterday, the bombshell, the day your world stopped. If he was here now, you'd be packing his bags, crying and swearing but he isn't, he's at some conference in Hull, and you are sitting and thinking.

As a couple you are nearly "empty nesters", James and Nat are at Uni's, and the youngest Jules is at college but stays with her mate Mon to Thur, then is out all weekend with boyfriend. They are all doing well, good kids. You and John met at Lancaster, twenty eight years ago, he was an archaeology student at Lancaster University and you, teacher training at 'Smarties', otherwise known as St Martins. You went steady, you became a teacher at a Lancaster primary school, he worked for county archaeology, then married, then children, then you never went back to work. You both worked hard at buying and doing up houses, children, houses and homes, moving eight times, now you live in this great old farmhouse with three acres and barns. And he's head of county "fossil" department. We where always happy, you think, least you where, you think sadly. You'd always followed your mum's marital advice to love each other, always be polite, never shout and

have sex often, well define "often", you wonder, is that what's gone wrong? True it had been becoming fewer over the years but that's normal, in fact you consider, trying to remember, have we done it since Christmas?

Turning the fag packet over in between your fingers, you look around at the herb garden and sigh, wipe a tear, look at your hands and wrestle to yourself about faithfulness and what is unfaithfulness? Never seen a sign of him wavering, you'd always thought you'd be collecting the pension together. But you doubt it all now, he's always been away at digs and conferences, always had pretty young students around him, plenty of opportunity. What is unfaithfulness you ask yourself, flirting? Looking at porn? Kissing, fucking? Does a fling, if he's had one that you don't know about make him unfaithful? Does a grope at an office party that went no further constitute disloyalty?

You suppose, as you watch a heron gracelessly flap along over a field, that unfaithfulness is actually what the other partner considers to be unfaithful, because if you were swingers then having sex with someone else isn't being unfaithful, some people may not object to porn but others would. Would going out in town with the intention of chatting someone up or getting laid but failing to do so be considered being unfaithful? In other words is the mental action of wanting to, equal to the actuality of doing it? Like in murder, that it's not murder without the intention.

You decide you don't know, but as you pick up your mug and head back to the house you are beginning to get an idea, and a thin smile visits your lips as you sing to yourself quietly, "take to your bed, say there's peace in sleep, but you dream of love instead, and oh when you fall, fall at my door".

In the week there's, Womens Institute, sometimes parish council, a voluntary afternoon at the hospice, pilates on Mondays, spinning on Fridays, and bit of a work out with your friends Hilly and Louise at Hilly's gym at her home usually on Tuesdays, before lunch a glass of wine and a natter. But it wasn't like that yesterday. It was like this.

Hilly is a pretty blue eyed blonde, a trophy wife, some would say, you met her when the kids were at primary school, she's a few years younger than you, and Louise you met through Hilly and she is also a good friend. Louise is dippier than Hilly but means well, her main interests are shopping and more shopping. Today they are standing at the door looking serious as you pull up in front of Hilly's.

"My friend", at the golf club, "well, Sheila er whatsherface, you know, works behind the bar, about forty, round?" she stammers out, you nod helpfully but not really knowing what Hilly is on about, "has seen your, er, you'd better see for yourself, come with". And with that Hilly and Louise stride inside across the hall and towards the lounge, Hilly picks up her apple ipad, from the glass coffee table, motions you to sit next to her, Louise passes you a glass of wine, "its too early" you say, putting it down, Louise replies, "You may need it". Now you are worried, what is going on? Hilly taps the screen and opens a browser, types a website address and a red and white website appears, adult dating, swinging, extra affairs, you can't believe your eyes, Hilly leans over the ipad squints a bit and types a user and pass clicks, search, chooses distance, chooses most recent, chooses with picture, and a page of mens faces, and mens willies appears, Hilly squints a bit and clicks on a face, clicks again and passes you the tablet.

And there in front of your eyes, is John your husband, his face, his eyes looking at you through a computer screen, and he's smiling. And you know he's actually smiling at you because he was, because you took the picture on holiday, in a cafe in Vienna last year. And afterwards you walked hand in hand smiling and happy together towards the Hapsburg Palace, to see the Spanish Riding

School perform, your birthday surprise and lifelong ambition.

Reaching forward you bring the wine glass to your lips and drain it and replace it, your head pounds, you can't focus for a second, you feel dizzy. Louise has lit up, and the smell of smoke makes you feel sick. Your hands are shaking, you pass the offending image towards Hilly, who mumbles something. Louise says something too but you don't know what it is, you are standing up, putting a hand over your mouth and heading for the door and you start running in the hall, outside as you reach the Range Rover, you grab it's passenger door handle as bile enters your mouth and you bend and retch and retch. Hilly is at your side and puts her arms on you, but as you stand, you have a sudden overwhelming feeling that you just want to be home.

Tears stream down your cheeks as you drive, you scream out loud, "Bastard!" for three whole miles then "Why!, Why! Why!" Until you reach the farmhouse. You slam the front door and the lounge door, load and ram logs into the stove and cuddle up into a ball on the floor, pulling a big cushion under your head and a rug off the settee, and you lie there until it starts to go dark outside just watching the flames consume the wood until all that remains is a dull orange glow.

Rising you go to the bathroom, wash your face, clean your teeth and you look at yourself in the mirror, dark brown eyes, shoulder length brown hair, a kind face you've always been told, pear shape and pretty, you are in good shape and slim, not bad for your age. Feeling a bit better you erase answer phone messages from Hilly, Louise and also John, open a bottle of chardonnay and fill a glass, taking the bottle back to the lounge, refill the logs in the stove, sit on the floor, lean forward and switch on the hi-fi and scan the nearby cd's, thinking I haven't played any for ages, the you notice a new one, a compilation, opening the jewel case you place Joan Armatrading into the cd drawer. She sings, "Cool Blue, stole my heart", you skip it onto, "Love and Affection", and it takes you back to the student days, an afternoon making love with John as Joan sang about, water with the wine, "this boy was getting hot, got no strength to make him stop, guess it's too late, but I'll know next time, mix some water with the wine", smiling at the thought until Joan launches into, "Down to zero". Her words find places in your heart and your in your head, as you sip the wine and go back in time.

"Hilly?",

"Yes, Kate, are you Ok?" comes the reply,

"I have a plan, are you free soon"

"Oh, yes, free all aft", Hilly sounds relieved to hear from you, "What you going to do?" A curious inflection in her voice.

As you arrive at Hilly's, she is out weeding, "I do like this time of year, one can give the garden a jolly old tidy, if it comes out easily it's a weed, if it doesn't it probably isn't", then her eyes widen and Hilly leans back seeing you with a case, "Good God girl, you've not left him, have you?" muttering Hilly adds, "Fuck, Kate, he is only on a date site, you haven't caught him with his cock out".

Laughing, you say, "Not yet Hilly, I have decided to play a little game"

"Well I'm glad you to see you smiling", Hilly hugs you, "come on then spill the beans".

Over coffee you tell Hilly your idea, and she explains how the marital dating site works, then she takes some alluring photos of you; details really, your ankle in a high heel, a close up of a nipple, a side view of your back with your hair dangling down over your skin, all done in black and white, very sensual and ambiguous.

Next Hilly organises an hotmail account for your email and suggests you write your profile down.

"Not too serious, just looking for fun, with a special person, are you the man of my dreams, or the

devil in disguise, may I care?"

"Ok", says Hilly, "Now for some fun!" and opens the dating site and proceeds to create a new account for you in the name of Scarlet, uploads the pictures, clicks the verification email and goes to your profile. "Think we'll have you living, er twenty miles away, married, not pierced, favourite position?" Hilly stops ticking boxes, looks you in the eye and smirks, "can you remember?" You are blank, "er, missionary?", "I think we need to be a bit more suggestive", giggles Hilly, "How about cowgirl! And now your profile, that needs to be sexier too" and Hilly types as you dictate.

"A scarlet woman, scarlet in name and by nature, many may seek me but few will find. I will grace with my affections a solitary one, you do not deserve me, if I choose, you will serve me.

I will intoxicate you as I dance, burlesque, your femme fatale. I require bedecking with gold and jewels and you shall be drunk in fornication with me and I shall receive and ensnare your power. There is only one Scarlet, I defeat devils, irresistible to all, a warning you take me at your peril"

"Fuck", says Hilly, "Where did that come from Kate?"

"er, I don't know"

"I'm glad to see there's fight in my girl!", Hilly makes some clicks and says, right it's set up, checks the email and says that it is now been accepted.

"When is John back?"

"Tomorrow, Friday eve"

That evening you research the web site, amazed at what you see, what you read, amused by some, disgusted by others, why do men want to put photos of their willies on the internet? You even fancy some of the men despite yourself, they write of "no shows" and of "conquests" in their diaries, it's all quite strangely addictive. So many men are looking for another female to join in.

You almost feel sorry for John as you look at his page, not just because he hasn't completed his profile, but because there are just so many men, absolutely loads of them. You decide to wink at him. In your inbox there are five hundred messages, it seems the website has sent out an automated message on your behalf and so many have replied, you delete them. You decide to make him a favorite, and you click and check "viewed me" and in amongst forty or so male faces and their genitalia is Johns fizzog.

Switching off the computer you go outside onto the patio, and look around and up at the stars as you sip your wine, a cold but cloudless night, you wonder about having a cigarette. Jupiter and Venus are so close to each other, two of the brightest stars, hanging like lanterns, dominating the night sky. Being the wife of an archaeologist, history is a common interest and you remember that Jupiter is the Roman equivalent of Zeus the god of the sky and thunder, and Venus the Roman goddess of love, and you think about your love, the gods and John.

You leave a note for John, gone to the flicks with Hilly back late. You haven't really, you and Hilly are sharing a glass of wine on her patio overlooking Windermere, the Lake blue and shimmering stretches towards the burnt amber sunshine on the bracken covering Loughrigg in the distance.

Hilly's singing, "So if you like Pina Colanders and getting caught in the rain",

"Its Coladas, Hilly!"

"So if you like penis calendars and getting shagged out yer brain" She retorts giggling.

"Hilly!" You rebuke, " I've seen enough of them to last me a lifetime, this week"

"You might see a stiff one in the flesh later, if your lucky" Hilly whispers, "That song was about a man dating his wife, as was er, ha!", Hilly dances an exaggerated ballet, and squeaks, "Oh Heathcliffe, it's me Cathy, Oh come on home now" She shakes her head and hair, and makes a Kate Bush pout , gulps down her wine and turns to you.

"You are going to trap him, aren't you Kate the Babooosh-kaaa", Hilly laughs, "come with", and you follow her into the house and upstairs into her sumptuous bedroom. "This is my bedroom, hubby snores too much, too often", white linen bed, cream carpet, warm and welcoming. You both sit on the bed and Hilly switches on her ipad. You log in.

John - today - 7.05

"I am flattered that you have made me a favourite, and that you looked at me, although I don't know what you look like, from what I can see that you must be a stunning woman, your profile left me breathless." A message from John on your control panel.

You - today - 8.10

"You will have to try harder than that, you worm", you reply, picturing John at home on his computer, the worm.

John - today - 8.12

"How can I please you madam?"

You - today - 8.14

"Are you worthy, are you worth it, you serpent?"

John - today - 8.15

"What so ever you wish"

You - today - 8.16

"What's in it for me, I bet you lie like a cheap watch, you heel".

Hilly's laughing and going for more wine. "Wind 'im up, babe!"

John - today - 8.17

" Hey, I was only being nice, if we met what would you like to eat?"

You - today - 8.19

"Never mind what, lets talk where, do you have a limo to take me to the helicopter? Then one of the better hotels, ones in the Lakes only, and obviously with its own pad, snake"

Hilly returns hands you what can only be described as a bucket of wine in a glass, laughs, bends over, rummages in a drawer and retrieves a wooden box inlaid with pretend ivory, opens it and takes out a joint and matches and lights it, then goes to her bathroom to find something to use as an ashtray.

"Well?" Says Hilly, if your gonna catch him ya need to date him".

John - today - 8.20

"I can try, give me a minute"

"Hilly, can I have some of that", Hilly passes the joint, "It's been a long twenty something years".

"How do you feel about him now, Kate?"

"I don't know, I don't know whether I want to kill him or love him up, I don't feel angry like I did, calmed down now"

Hilly gets up and takes all her clothes off in front of you, you admire her breasts standing proud despite her years and her trim body, and you laugh, "what are you doing, Hilly", and the smoke catches the back of your throat causing you to cough.

"Tell you in a minute, darling", Hilly heads for the bathroom, you hear the shower running.

John - today 8.30

"Esparrago 7.30 tomorrow, I've booked it in the name of Bush"

"Fuck, Hilly, I've got a date", excitedly you run to the bathroom, Hilly is drying herself and you can't help your gaze run over her. But return to the bed and pick up the spliff and your wine and type, "Ok" and click send. You lie back exhale the smoke and relax, maybe it's the dope but you feel really relaxed. Hilly comes over to the bed still naked and takes the joint from you. "Remember blowbacks?"

Hilly takes a great big drag and climbs on top you, and brings her lips to yours and exhales the marijuana as you breath it in. You choke a little and Hilly sits back, kneeling over your waist, her breasts are so close and her nipples are erect, she is moist from the shower. You reach out and gently touch one, the dope is spinning your head now, Hilly moves forward and her nipple finds your mouth, you take it in and suck it for a second. Then you realise what you are doing and sit up. "You Ok" Asks Hilly, "Yeh fine", Hilly gets off the bed and goes over to her wardrobe and once again you can't help yourself admire her back and bottom and legs as she chooses a dress.

Hilly walks over to you as if to give you a great look as she puts it on.

"No knickers? Hilly", You slur, "No, I'll show you why"

Hilly picks up the ipad, logs out of your account and logs into hers, and clicks, "Hubby will be back in a few minutes and then we are going to meet Rosy and Ken".

"Rosy and Ken!", You ask incredulously, "Yes, look" and in-front of you appears "Rosy", a tall, thin oriental looking lady with jet black long hair that comes almost to her waist, she is stunning and Hilly clicks on the other pictures you can see that she is perfectly lithe and has a dragon tattoo that covers most of her back, the tail finishing in the groove of her behind.

You read the profile, " am a 44 year old highly sexed women - bi curious, looking for a couple to join me & my straight partner Ken 46 for first time foursome fun. I love all kinds of sex & am willing to try anything once. So if your up for a bit of fun please contact me for a chance to try my delights."

"Fuckin Hell, Hilly, Fuckin Hell!", is about all you can say, as you get up and walk to the bathroom, but not in a very straight fashion, "I'll text John in a bit and tell him you are staying here tonight, since you can't walk", and from the bathroom staring at your white face in the mirror you reply, "Please do, Hilly". You don't really want to see him, and you know he can't see, Mrs Goodie Two Shoes in this state.

Hilly shouts that they are off now, you didn't hear her husband come back, but anyway, you gingerly make your way back to the bed, and lie down. As you stare at the ceiling and wish it would stay still, you think, in a few days you've done things and seen things from a different perspective, affairs, relationships, the words, bi curious, return to you and you wonder if maybe you are a little.

You awake, the clock tells you its 3.30 am, rising, you head to the bathroom, undress and run the shower, enjoying the feeling of the rivulets of water running over your body, refreshing, and oddly you are feeling a little turned on as you run soap over yourself. You dry and get into bed and pull the covers over you, and close your eyes.

Your eyelids creak open, just awake and in a dreamy second, you realise that someones fingers are touching you between your legs, you remember where you are, the clock says 5.05, you realise it's Hilly, and its nice, you exhale and peer quietly and see her form under the covers. As if to feign sleep, you don't tense your legs unsure what to do, resist or acquiesce? You inhale without a sound as you feel Hilly gently push your legs apart, and feel her move up to get closer to you. You pretend

to be asleep as you feel her fingers part your vagina and then the sensation of her gently licking your clitoris. Unable now to resist you relax into it and moan gently as she pleasures you. Your hands find Hilly's as she reaches to squeeze your nipples, you squeeze her fingers tightly as you feel a wave, a rush, a surge of uncontrollable orgasm. Hilly doesn't stop and a few minutes later you come again.

Hilly comes up the bed and cuddles you, you put your head on her shoulder and suddenly feel such emotion that you gently weep. You don't know for who or why, you just do. Hilly turns over and you put your arms around her and kiss the back of her neck, your hands explore Hilly's breasts and then down and into her vagina, then you kneel over her and Hilly rubs herself against your leg until she too comes. Then you kiss and then sleep.

"Hi, Kate, time to get up", Hilly puts down a cup of tea on the bedside, it's 12.15 the clock tells you, stretching, you smile as Hilly opens the curtains and spring sunshine streams in. Hilly, who looks bright, breezy, fresh and happy, sits next to you, "Don't worry", she pecks you on the forehead, "What happens here, stays here, now up you get, big day today".

You come downstairs, still feeling a bit dizzy, Hilly tells you that her hubby and yours are golfing together, then your John said he was going to see his mum but we all know different don't we.

Returning home the place is empty, exhausted you sit in the garden chair with a paper and in moments drift off. Wakening when you suddenly feel cold, your watch says it's 5.05, shit! Dashing into the house and upstairs to the shower, need to leave at about seven to get to the restaurant you calculate. And as you are in the shower you wonder to yourself, how did he manage to get a table, short notice for the next day at peak time at a two star Michelin restaurant just like that?

The nerves start to hit as you drive, constantly checking yourself in the rear view mirror, you know you look good, perfect hair, lips, your best black dress. But now you feel terribly bad inside because you are the one who's been unfaithful, yet it's him that you are going to catch out aren't you Babushka? There's no venom in you now, you just can't wait to see his face, will he shit himself? What will he say? What will you say? You laugh out loud as if nothing else will give you some confidence because really, in the vernacular you think to yourself you are "bricking it".

Parking outside the restaurant, you are starting to feel more queasy, starting to feel guilty about your guilty pleasure, your guilty secret. Guilt is controlling your legs, they shake, your heart is thumping, you try but can't swallow. Taking a deep breath you swing your legs out of the car and walk as steadily as you can to the restaurant entrance. A charming man seems to know who you are and leads you to a table, the place is packed with diners except for a large table near the entrance with a reserved sign. You sit, and are brought a glass of champagne, the waiter tells you that your guest will be along in a minute and you sip the champagne and gaze out of the window.

From behind you, you hear a familiar voice, "Kate", you turn and John is on one knee with a little box in his hand that is open, with an eternity ring sticking up, "I love you Kate and always have, this is an early 25th wedding anniversary party and celebration", and as you look up from him, a great big "Hooray!", goes up as you look and see your friends, family, children, Hilly and husband, raising their champagne glasses from their seats at the large table.

Overawed, it is all you can say to stammer, "I love you too, so much too, John, you don't know quite how much, and maybe I do" tears blur your vision as you whisper in his ear, "tomorrow I am going to murder you and Hilly!"

-----