

IN THE SPARE ROOM

A Flash Fiction

(TRIGGER WARNING: BEREAVEMENT.)

DREENA
COLLINS

For the first two hours, she sat next to him. It wasn't that she was in denial. It genuinely was hard to tell. His breath had been shallow, anyway. You could barely see his chest rise and fall.

There had been a few times, recently, when she had already thought he had passed. She placed her flat, cold palm on his torso: burrowing her fingers into the gaps between pyjama buttons. But he was still there. His chest rising, falling, skin clefting and swelling between ribs in a concertina.

So when it did happen, finally, it was a sort of anti-climax. She didn't notice the exact point he stopped breathing. She was in and out of the living room, cups of tea, dusting, wittering-away-as-usual-you-silly-woman. It didn't occur to her that he would go then. Everything was far too normal.

She felt disappointed not to have been by his side. A little ashamed at her poor judgement. Of course she wouldn't realise. Of course.

After an hour had passed, she knew she'd left it a little too long. It wasn't normal behaviour. There'd be questions about the wait. But the truth is, part of her suspected that at any moment he'd jump up and laugh that thick and phlegmy laugh of his, which made her think of sour milk, and curds. And she'd laugh too, no doubt. She'd laugh too. Though it wouldn't be funny.

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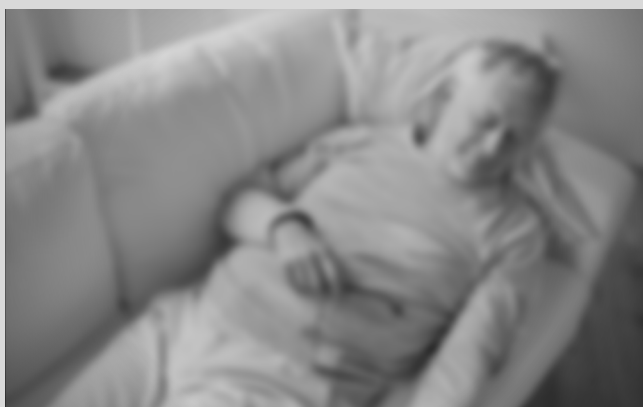
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Initially, he looked exactly the same. Pale, yes, but he had always been so. And he was in the same position. Lying neatly, the way that he did. Arms by his sides.

After a couple of hours, maybe three, his mouth dropped open. She didn't like that. Like silent yelling. She made herself touch him, to close his jaw again, even though she knew that either she was touching a corpse, or she was forcing her husband to shut his mouth. Either way, frightening.

But it wouldn't shut. The bones pushed back with force against her fingers, his lips felt strangely cold and dry. Hard. So she pulled the sheet up further. Just under his nose, in case he needed to breathe.



After about ten hours, she knew he was really dead. The sleeve of his pyjamas was ridden up and there was a strange discolouration in his skin - like a bruise, the whole length of his forearm. He was two tone. Raw bacon at the bottom. White lard at the top.

At that point, it was clear that her behaviour was strange. Suspicious, even. No-one sits with a body for half a day. That's weird. That's peculiar. She knew that.

She wasn't crazy.

She decided to take him to the spare bedroom. Maybe he'd been right to want a bungalow after all. She'd never have managed the stairs. It took quite a while - she stopped several times; at one point she even made a sandwich to keep her strength up. Ham.

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The friction of the Axminster dragged his trousers down, eventually revealing his genitals - penis disappointed and withered. She left it exposed. Knew he would have hated that. He would have been furious. But she had other concerns.

Now she had reached the room, and of course she had imagined she would put him to bed. It seemed the logical thing to do. But clearly that was impossible - it had taken hours to get him this far, and she had only managed it by pulling and yanking him. She'd never be able to lift him up.



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She made a sort of put-me-up bed on the floor. A nest. Lay him back in his usual position, though she didn't cover him. His trousers remained partially down. His pyjama top in disarray, chest hair poking through gaps like steel wool. He would have been so cross, with his privates on display, dry and mottled as a rotting Conference Pear.

That was the best she could do. After that, she was glad to have the sofa back, and the house to herself. Most of the time, at first, she simply pretended that he didn't exist. Or that he had never existed. But she went into the room every so often, and sat quietly on the bed. Lost in her thoughts again. And in all honesty, she did feel better after she had visited him, in those first few days

After about a day and a half the smell started. Heavy, musty, peculiar. Then she went in less often. It was hard to stomach.

On day four, she took her morning coffee in, and was surprised to find he was leaking. His purple and white tone was turning green, and liquid oozed from his ears, and his still-open mouth. The smell was getting more powerful, too. Beefy. Putrid. Foul. She felt her stomach rise up, hit her oesophagus. So she only managed a couple of minutes, then stood up again and walked out. Calling goodbye, thinking perhaps it really was over. He really was gone. No need to pretend, anymore.

Leaving him behind, with his lime skin and pear penis and floppy mouth and meat-stock stench.

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ON DAY FOUR, SHE TOOK HER MORNING COFFEE IN, AND WAS SURPRISED TO FIND HE WAS LEAKING.

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He would have hated that. The indignity. The humiliation.

She knew that.

She wasn't crazy.



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