

Senex

by Brigid Burke

Clive looked at his phone. There was a message from his wife.

“Hello darling—I ran into Jill—haven’t seen her in ages. I know you’re busy working tonight, so we’re going to head over to the pub for a few drinks. I shouldn’t be home too late. Talk to you later—love you.”

He stared at his phone, chewing his lower lip. *Why the hell had he turned his phone off?*

Clive and Fiona had been married for 3 years. Clive was a philosophy lecturer at a university just outside of London. Fiona had recently obtained her doctorate in linguistics, and was now a full-time lecturer at the same university. Clive had met Fiona while attending a conference in Los Angeles in the United States. The two became fast friends, and eventually their relationship developed into a romance. There was a significant age gap between them—Fiona was 27, and her husband was 65. Still, the attraction between them was so strong, and Clive hated to be away from her. He finally asked her to marry him, and to come to London to live with him. He was greatly relieved and delighted when she said yes.

Everyone said they had the perfect marriage, in spite of their age difference. They were financially comfortable so they didn’t fight about money, and Fiona was very unusual in her fierce fidelity to Clive. While she was polite to the male colleagues and friends in her life, she never looked at anyone but Clive. Clive was madly in love with her, and though very pleased about her fidelity, it almost seemed like a dream to him. He had been burned in past relationships, and could not believe that there was a woman out there who would not be tempted by someone else, even if they loved their partner.

I have everything I want, thought Clive. I couldn’t ask for a better wife, and I couldn’t possibly love her more.

So why am I always sure she’s going to leave me?

When other men spoke to Fiona, even in normal conversation, he felt uneasy. Many of her married female friends didn’t place a high value on monogamy, and even though Clive didn’t dislike her friends, their stance made him nervous. What if Fiona was talked into carrying on with someone else? What if she went out on her own and someone else forced himself on her?

It’s ridiculous. I’m being a twat. Fiona has her own mind, and is not going to let anyone do that.

Still, Clive had a hard time. In the beginning, he convinced himself that he was just adjusting to the new marriage. He had been burned in the past by an unfaithful wife, so it was only natural that he would worry about such a thing. Time would prove his concerns to be baseless. Time HAD proven just that. The

future is uncertain, but there just didn't seem to be any evidence that his marriage was anything less than what it was before.

But Clive couldn't help himself. When she was at work in her department, if he knew that she was talking to male colleagues, he would hide himself and eavesdrop on their conversations. If she was going to the pub with friends, he would call a friend in the area to drop into the pub and check on her movements. Later, he began finding underhanded ways of keeping her home. If she said she was going to meet her friends, he would feign illness, or some emergency at home to keep her from going out. When he couldn't do that convincingly, he would try to talk her out of it by conjuring up all kinds of negatives—the weather was bad, there had been crime in the area recently, she would have to get up early for work. Most of the time these things worked.

Now, walking towards his car in the university car park, he felt anxious. She had given him the slip—called him about going out, and his phone was off. He was so angry he wanted to throw the damn thing into the Thames. He usually set it to vibrate—why didn't he do that?

Sitting in his car, he stared at the dashboard. *Dammit, Clive, why can't you just leave it alone? She's not doing anything wrong. You know you have the perfect marriage.*

He looked up. *Is anything perfect?*

Trembling, Clive took the phone out of his pocket, and called her. He held his breath as the phone rang. Finally, she answered.

"Hey babe, what's up?"

"Oh, uh nothing—I got your call. Where are you now?" His voice was tight.

"I'm at the Grange. Where are you? Are you OK?"

"I've just left my office—I'm about to drive home."

"Do you want to join us?"

"Who are you with?"

"Just Jill and her boyfriend." He felt himself tense up. He paused before answering.

"I see—it's rather late, I'm not sure I'm up for going out. Are you coming home soon?"

"Maybe in another hour."

"Could you come home sooner?"

There was a pause. "Why? Is everything OK?"

"Oh everything's fine, darling, I've just missed you all day. I may be asleep in another hour."

"Alright then, I'll leave in a few minutes."

“Darling?”

“Yes Clive?”

“Please be careful coming home, OK?”

“Yes, I will. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

He hung up the phone, relieved that she was coming home, and feeling a bit foolish. He started the car, and drove away towards their house.

When he arrived at home, Fiona was still not there. He felt a sudden surge of panic. He went inside, turned the lights on, and put his things down. He went upstairs and took his jacket and tie off and loosened his shirt before coming back downstairs. A few minutes later, Fiona walked in.

He whirled around. “Where have you been?”

She looked startled. “What do you mean?”

“I thought you were leaving in a few minutes when I spoke to you. You should have beat me home.”

“Well Clive, it’s a long walk—you’ve got the car. And besides, does it matter? It looks like you’re just getting in.”

Clive sighed. “I guess not.” He kissed her. “How was your evening out?”

“It was lovely. I haven’t seen Jill in ages. We had a lot to catch up on. I don’t think we quite got through everything. I’ll have to meet up with her again.”

Clive nodded, stifling his anger.

“How was your day?”

He shrugged. “Oh, the usual, you know. I had 2 lectures, one this morning, one this afternoon. And lots of projects to look over. I have to get those finished up before next week.”

Fiona eyed her husband. She could tell he was uptight about something. She opened her mouth to say something, then stopped.

Clive looked at her. “Were you going to say something, darling?”

Fiona paused. “Nah. Just thinking. Shall we get comfortable?”

“Sounds like a good idea. Shall I pour you a drink?”

“That would be wonderful.”

Fiona retreated upstairs and changed into her night clothes. Clive came in behind her with 2 glasses of wine. After a few sips he seemed to relax, and they began to chat more easily. They slowly moved their way to the bed. Clive slid his hands underneath her nightgown, and ran his fingers down her legs, to her

feet. He kissed her feet gently. She removed her nightgown, and Clive began to unbutton his shirt. Grabbing the tie he had discarded earlier, he flipped her over and bound her wrists. He then took her hairbrush off of the dresser and pulling her over his knee, he began to spank her with it. She gave a little cry each time the brush made contact with her flesh. Clive stopped, opened her closet, and pulled out one of her scarves. Pushing her hair back, he pushed the scarf into her mouth and tied it neatly behind her head. He then pulled her back over his knee and began again with the brush.

He ran his hand over her reddened bottom. He was rock-hard and wanting to enter her. “You’ve been a bad girl today, running off without my permission. This is your punishment.” He continued to smack her behind as she yelped, and finally he put it down. Laying her flat, he began to bite her on the buttocks, and the back of her legs. He came down to her feet again, and bit her toes, sucking on them. He rubbed the tops of her feet along his cheekbone, and then lowered them and rested them on his cock. Unable to contain himself any longer, he flipped her over, parted her legs, and entered her. He leaned forward and kissed her breasts. He enjoyed looking at her when she was helpless. He slowed down his pace, and ran his finger over her clitoris, bringing her to climax. Finally he came himself, shuddering with ecstasy, ready to collapse with exhaustion afterwards.

He withdrew from her, wiped himself off, and then untied her. Pulling her close, he began to kiss her. “I wasn’t too rough on you, was I darling?” He rubbed her wrists gently. Fiona grinned at him. “You were a little rough. But it was good.” They began to kiss—they must have kissed for almost 15 minutes as Clive held her. It felt so good to hold her. The anger he’d felt melted away. He stroked her hair, and looked into her eyes. Fiona relaxed, but she could not get the phrase out of her mind: *Going out without my permission*.

The next month was relatively calm. Clive and Fiona were both very busy with their work, so there was really no time for either of them to go anywhere but work and home. Clive felt his wave of paranoia ebb away, and he was relieved. He felt foolish about his insecurities, and hoped that he’d finally put them to rest.

One afternoon, Clive was meeting with one of his students, a young man called Jason.

After their discussion of his project, Jason stood up to leave. Before he left, he turned around. “Mr. White?”

“Yes?”

“My friends and I were wondering—is Mrs. White in the Linguistics department your wife?”

Clive looked up. "Yes she is. Why?"

Jason stared at him. "Wow. Lucky you. Well, goodbye Mr. White."

Clive nodded, and when the boy had shut the door behind him, he sat back in his chair thoughtfully. He knew he should have been flattered by the remark. *Or was it a backhanded criticism? Saying he was too old? And why are those little bastards looking at my wife anyway?*

Clive gave a deep sigh. *Oh Jesus Christ. Why can't I just accept that I have a beautiful wife and people will look at her? Women look at me when I'm out doing things. I don't get involved with them, and my wife isn't going to mess around with students.*

Is she?

Don't be bloody stupid.

But how do you know?

Because I have the perfect marriage.

He began battling with himself in his head, his sense of reason trying to reason his way out of the paranoia that was increasingly like toxic waste in his soul. And he didn't know how to get rid of it.

Nothing is perfect.

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. Startled, he called out, "Come in."

Andrew, one of his art department colleagues and an old friend, walked in. "Hullo, Clive. I wanted to let you know what's going on with final projects."

"Oh, yes, do tell me."

They discussed the end of term details, and then Andrew turned to leave. Clive looked at his watch. "Andrew, do you see Fiona out there anywhere? She usually pops in around this time."

Andrew peered out the door. "Not yet. "

Clive nodded. "I'll have to give her a call and see what's up."

"You're a lucky man there, Clive."

"Hmm? Why?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. Lovely young wife, always being adored by her students—never gives them a second look. You really do have the perfect marriage."

Clive forced himself to smile. "Yes, Fiona is the best thing that ever happened to me."

"Indeed! Speaking of, here she comes now. I'll get a move on. Ta."

Why did Andrew say that? Why did he have to say that? I feel like I'm being jinxed...

Fiona peered into his office. "Hello, love. Am I interrupting anything?"

Clive smiled at her. "Not at all, darling. I've just finished for the day. Let's go home."

"Yes, please. This day seemed to take forever to get through."

They walked out towards the car, talking. As they were driving home, Clive said "So, it seems you're quite a hit with your students."

"Oh really? Who told you that?"

"Well, one young man asked if you were my wife today, and Andrew made a reference to how adored you are by your male pupils."

Fiona laughed. "Oh be serious. They do not—they hate my essays."

Clive laughed. "Well, I haven't heard that."

Fiona shook her head. "I'm not aware of any of my students having a crush on me. If they think that, they're doing a good job of hiding it. Or maybe I'm just clueless, because I'm not looking for it."

Clive smiled again. "Well, it's not surprising, darling. You're very beautiful."

"Well, I'm sure some of your female students are in lust over you as well!"

"Oh, I doubt that—I'm just an old man to them."

"Ridiculous! I'm an old woman to my students as well."

Eventually they changed the subject. Arriving home, they had supper, and went up to bed. As they lay in bed together, Clive turned over, and climbed on top of Fiona, kissing her. They ended up making love. Clive's kisses began to turn into bites. He began to bite her fiercely on her breasts, and then on her neck as he brought himself to climax. Fiona did not seem to mind. He finally withdrew himself, and both were so exhausted they went right to sleep.

That night, Clive had a dream. He and Fiona were sitting in their parlor, across the room from each other. They both were reading. He could hear raindrops hitting the windows. The house shook slightly as fierce winds kicked up outside. Clive stood up and looked out the window at the coming storm. Fiona did not seem to notice. He went over to the fireplace and closed the flue. Seized by sudden anxiety, he walked around the house, locking and bolting doors—both doors to the outside, and doors on the inside. But as he closed and locked the doors, they suddenly started to fly open. Panicked, he ran into the basement, looking for anything to board up the doors with. He started nailing doors shut, barring them with two by fours. Soon he had feverishly nailed up every door in the house. Fiona still sat reading, totally unmoved by his efforts. The house continued to sway. Suddenly the floorboards started to creak, as if something was coming through the floors. Fiona finally peered over her book, and looked down at the heaving oak boards. She looked up at Clive and smiled—he could not read the meaning in her smile. There was a growling, and

a chewing and swallowing noise coming from below the house. Clive was now just about delirious with fear, and could not understand how his wife was so calm.

He gave out a yell, and woke up. When he did so, Fiona turned over.

“Clive? What’s the matter? Are you all right?”

Clive was drenched in sweat, his heart pounding. “I...God, I think I’m OK. I had a horrible dream.”

“A dream? What was it?”

Clive relayed the details of the dream to her. Fiona reached over and hugged him. “Don’t worry sweetheart—it was only a dream. Do you want me to get you something from downstairs?”

Clive smiled at her. “It’s all right, darling—I’ll go down myself. I’m restless now and want to make myself sleepy again. Don’t you worry—you need your sleep. I’ll be back upstairs soon.”

“All right then. But let me know if you need me.”

“All right.” Clive smiled and kissed her on the forehead.

Clive went downstairs and poured himself a stiff drink. He was still trembling slightly. He wished he could understand what was bothering him. Logic seemed entirely useless. After walking around for a bit, he felt lightheaded, and went back up to bed.

The next morning, he woke up feeling like he never slept. Fiona woke up, and went into the bathroom. He heard her give a cry. He ran over to the door and opened it.

“What’s the matter darling?”

“Jesus Christ, Clive, look at this!”

He looked at her breasts and neck. He had left purple bruises all over her when he bit her the night before.

“Oh my God, I am so sorry darling. I had no idea that I was that rough.”

Fiona groaned. “It’s warm out today, and I’m going to have to wear a turtleneck. I can’t go to work looking like this.”

Clive held her. “I’m so sorry. Really, I am. I don’t know what I can do.”

“Well, there’s not much either of us can do, they just have to fade. Never mind, I’ll just be sure to keep them covered. But good Lord, Clive! You’re going to have to tone it down.”

“They don’t hurt do they?”

“No, they don’t hurt.”

“Fiona?”

“Yes?”

Clive paused. "They don't look that bad. You could show them."

"No way, Clive, not unless you want people to think you're a wife beater."

"Oh, they're not that bad."

"Well, it might not be so bad if we were teenagers. But we're not."

Clive sighed. "Maybe you're right. But I am very sorry."

Fiona smiled. "Don't worry about it. Just be careful next time." She kissed Clive, and then kicked him out so she could get showered.

Clive and Fiona came home from work together that afternoon, and Fiona grabbed the post on the way in. Looking through the letters, there was one addressed to her. When she opened it, it was an invitation to a private exhibit opening from a very good friend of hers. She and Clive were both invited. Clive peered over her shoulder at the invitation, and looked at the date. It was the following Thursday. "Oh, we have to go to this, Clive—Vivian's been talking about it forever, and I really want to see it badly. She'll be hurt if we don't come."

"Well, I'd love to darling, but as it so happens, I need to be at the university that night for my students."

"Oh crap, are you kidding me?"

"No—the timing couldn't be worse."

Fiona sighed. "Well, I'll just go make an appearance then."

Clive stiffened. Finally he said, "Of course darling, one of us should go." The sound of his own voice was weird to him.

Fiona did not seem to notice. "I'll RSVP for this then. I'll put you down as 'maybe', in case something changes with your schedule."

"Good idea."

They settled down to dinner, and then finally to bed. Clive was tired, but he lay awake thinking about the exhibition. *Fiona will be out by herself again.*

He turned over and sighed. Why the hell couldn't he let that go? What did he think she was going to do, or what would happen to her? The utter stupidity of his thoughts frustrated him, but equally strong, and getting stronger was the feeling that he needed to keep her in.

The next morning Clive looked exhausted. Fiona looked at him with concern. "Did you sleep well last

night sweetheart?”

“No, not really. I’ve had so much on my mind.”

“Like what?”

Clive shrugged. “Oh, just stupid things. I wish I could turn my brain off.”

Fiona reached up and stroked his hair. “You really need to de-stress. Maybe you’re drinking too much caffeine.”

“Maybe.”

He looked down, then looked at her. He finally smiled, pulled her close, and kissed her forehead.

“Don’t worry darling, I’m sure I’ll be fine. I’ll sleep like the dead tonight.”

They drove to work in silence; Clive was too tired to talk. It was autumn time, and leaves were falling. One dead leaf had gotten itself wedged in one of the windshield wipers on the car. As Clive drove faster, Fiona watched the leaf writhing and struggling in the wind. Even with speed of the car on the motorway, the leaf tenaciously hung on, making a repetitive flapping noise against the windshield. Clive noticed it as well.

“Damn that stupid thing!”

“What’s the matter?”

“That leaf. The sound of it is driving me crazy.”

“Well, don’t get into an accident over it. I’ll get rid of it once we get to work.”

Clive gave a deep, irritated sigh. Fiona looked at him quizzically, but said nothing.

When they arrived at work, Fiona gently reached over and plucked the leaf from the windshield, setting it free. She and Clive kissed goodbye, and went to their respective departments.

Clive arrived at his office, but did not feel like doing anything. He pulled the exhibition opening invitation out of his case. He stared at it for a few minutes. Then he called Vivian.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Vivian, this is Clive.”

“Clive! How nice to hear from you. Did you get the invite to my opening?”

“Yes, Fiona and I got it yesterday. Unfortunately I can’t make it that night. I think Fiona may pop over, though.”

“Oh that’s too bad—we’ll miss you there.”

“Uh, Vivian?”

“Yes?”

“Who else has been invited to this opening?”

“Oh you know the usual crowd of friends.” She rattled off a few names while Clive listened. Then she said the name he hoped he wouldn’t hear: Jack.

Clive barely heard anything after that. *Jack is going to be there.*

Jack was Fiona’s ex-lover. He was a musician with a cult following, and very much the opposite of Clive in many ways. Fiona had ended her relationship with him when she met Clive. She would have ended it anyway; Jack was too strung out on drugs to be a consistent partner, and even though Fiona had fun times with Jack, she did not see him as relationship material. When Fiona and Clive were married, Jack threw a fit, which surprised everyone, especially Fiona. He said a few choice words to Clive that Clive never forgave him for saying.

Now his wife was going to an event—alone—and Jack would be there.

He mumbled some more polite conversation to Vivian, and then thanking her, he excused himself to go back to work. But he could not concentrate. *What am I going to do? If I say anything to Fiona, she might become annoyed, thinking I don’t trust her. Vivian really wants her to come. But I can’t rearrange my commitments—if I could, I would go along. Not that I want to see that fucker Jack. But I sure as hell don’t want her seeing him...*

Clive started pacing in his office. *She can’t go to that thing. Bottom line. End of story.*

He decided he would talk to her about it later in the day.

Clive came by Fiona’s office to get her after work. They made their usual run of day-to-day talk as they drove home. When they got home, Clive mentioned that he’d spoken to Vivian that day about her exhibition.

“Oh did you talk to her? I spoke to her about it too.”

“What did she say?”

“She was excited that I was coming, and sorry that you couldn’t make it, though they’d certainly let you in if things changed.”

Clive paused. “Did she mention who else would be there?”

“No, I didn’t ask.”

Clive bit his lip, trying to decide if he should tell her. Finally he said, “I asked her about who would be there. Apparently your former idiot boyfriend is going to be there.”

“Jack?”

“Yes.”

“Oh Jesus. Why did she invite him?”

“I don’t know. Are you sure you want to go this thing, darling?”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t I go?”

Clive looked at her. “You know how I feel about Jack.”

Fiona sighed. “Clive, I know. I have no intention of talking to him, and you know I don’t care for him a whit anymore.”

“I know darling, I know. It’s not that I don’t trust you, believe me. It’s him I don’t trust.”

“Why? What do you think he would do?”

“I don’t know. But he doesn’t give up grudges easily, and I know he still wants to get back at me for marrying you.”

“Oh, I don’t know Clive. I’m sure he’s given that up. He has a big mouth, but he’s too scared to do anything about his boasts and threats. Really, honey—I’m not planning to stay long. Just long enough to look at the exhibit and talk to Vivian for a few. I’m not planning on hanging out.”

Clive gave an exasperated sigh. “All right, all right, I’m probably being ridiculous. Darling, I just can’t help it—I’m so worried he’ll push you into something.”

Fiona laughed at this, and stroked his face reassuringly. “He wouldn’t dare. I would kick his ass.”

Clive looked up at her and tried to smile. They kissed and went on with their evening routine.

Clive tried to reassure himself that this compromise would work out. *But what if she meets up with a friend and ends up staying longer? What if he approaches her? What will she do? What if he follows her out?*

No. She can’t go. Period.

But how am I going to stop her?

Then he hit upon an idea.

That night Clive slept badly again. He dreamt that he was chasing after someone, and at the same time being chased by something dark and shapeless. He went around and around in circles, not sure what he was after, or what he was running away from. When he woke up that morning, he felt dreadful. Fiona took one look at him and suggested that he stay home. “I’m starting to worry about you, Clive. You look very ill.”

“I’m not getting any sleep.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know—it’s like I can’t turn my brain off.”

“Well what are you thinking about?”

“Oh, I don’t even know—all kinds of weird dreams that run together. It makes me dizzy.”

“Maybe you need to see a doctor.”

“I don’t know what the doctor would do. Probably just prescribe sleeping pills, and I don’t think that’s really going to solve it for me.”

“No, you’re probably right. If it’s your mind bothering you, then maybe you should consider therapy.”

Clive cringed. “I hate the idea of therapy. I don’t want to go that route unless I have to.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I like to feel like I’m in control of my own issues.”

Fiona laughed. “Very few people are in control of their real issues. It’s hard to solve them alone.”

Clive nodded. “That’s apparent. I don’t know, we’ll see what happens. In the meantime, I’m going to stay home today. Will you make it to work all right?”

“Yes, I’ll be fine. You relax—I want you to get some sleep, so why don’t you call me around noon if you’re awake?”

“All right darling. I’ll do that.”

Fiona left, and Clive contemplated what he wanted to do. He got himself dressed, and headed out to the chemist’s shop. He looked at various sleep inducers, and chose one that was strictly in powder form. Reading the bottle, it said it was supposed to act within 30 minutes. That should be enough time.

When he got home, he put the bottle behind some canisters of tea. If Fiona saw the bottle, he would say it was for himself.

The week went by, and the night of the exhibition finally came. Clive was restless all day. He had to work that night, so he was home during the day. Fiona finally came home from work at 4:00. Clive greeted her immediately at the door, and gave her a kiss. He then looked at her with concern.

“Darling, are you feeling all right?”

Fiona looked confused. “Yes, I feel fine. Why?”

“Well darling, you look so pale. You should sit down—I’ll make you a cup of tea.”

“Pale? I didn’t think I looked pale earlier.”

“Well you do now, darling. I’m a bit concerned about you. Let me make that tea, hopefully it will perk you up a bit.”

Fiona shrugged and sat down in the parlor. Clive asked her about her day while he moved about the

kitchen. Trembling, he put in the sweetener she preferred in her cup—and with it, a dose of the sleeping powder. He then boiled the water, put the tea into a teapot, and let it steep. He was impatient for the tea to brew, and paced about the kitchen, still talking to her. Finally it seemed ready, and he poured it. Clive handed Fiona the cup of tea, and had made a cup for himself as well. They sat talking, but Clive was a bit tense, and trying not to show it. Fiona finally asked him if anything was wrong.

“No, I don’t think so—why do you think something is wrong?”

“I don’t know—you seem tense and distracted.”

He smiled. “Oh, I’m all right darling, just the usual, and I’m not all that excited about having to work tonight.”

She smiled back at him. “Yes, it’s a shame you’re not coming. Ah well, these things happen. I’d better go get showered.” She drained the rest of her tea from the cup as Clive watched her. Then she put the cup in the kitchen sink and went upstairs.

Clive sat downstairs and waited. *Shouldn’t take longer than 30 minutes...*

While she was showering, Fiona began to feel dizzy. She finished her shower, and began to dry herself off, but she was having trouble standing up. She staggered out of the bathroom and into their bedroom. Clive had come upstairs at this point, and looked at her.

“Darling! Are you all right? My God, you should lay down.”

Clive took a hold of her and carefully steered her to the bed, arranging her wet hair behind her on the pillow. “I thought you looked ill,” he murmured.

“This is crazy, Clive. I didn’t feel ill at all when I came home.”

“Maybe you’re just starting a virus or something. Sometimes you don’t feel it right away.”

“Hmm, maybe. It’s just so weird. I just can’t miss the opening tonight!”

“I know you really want to go darling. But if you’re having a hard time standing up, how are you going to go? I won’t allow you to go if you’re so vertiginous.”

“I don’t know, Clive...I don’t know...”. Her eyelids began to droop.

“It’s all right, sweetheart,” he whispered. “You just rest. I’ll call Vivian and tell her that you’ve taken ill.”

Fiona felt so sleepy and out of it that she did not argue. Clive gently covered her up and tucked her in. He whispered to her, “I’ll be at my meeting tonight darling, but I’ll leave the phone by the bed. You absolutely call me if you need me, all right?”

She nodded.

Clive kissed her forehead, turned out the lights, and left the room, closing the door behind him. He let out a long sigh.

Clive called Vivian and told her that Fiona would not be coming, that she had suddenly taken ill. Vivian was naturally concerned, and Clive assured her that it was probably a strange virus, but it had come on so suddenly and with such unfortunate timing. He wished her well on the opening, and hung up.

On her end of the phone, Vivian thought Clive sounded very weird. It made her a little uneasy, and left her wondering if both of them were all right. She would have to call Fiona tomorrow.

The next day, Fiona woke up feeling hung over and groggy. Clive was in bed next to her, and awoke when he heard her stirring.

“How do you feel this morning, darling?”

“Like I’ve been hit by a truck. You?”

“I’m fine, I’m fine—look, I think you’d better stay home again today. Your color is good this morning, but if you’re still feeling fatigued, you shouldn’t rush back to work.”

Fiona sighed. “Clive, I don’t know—it’s so weird...”

“What’s so weird about it?” Fiona looked up in surprise at the defensiveness of his tone.

“What’s weird about it? I was perfectly fine until I came home last night, then I suddenly take ill before I’m going to my friend’s exhibition? I would say that’s weird.”

“Oh, you never know when these things will happen—one thing for sure is that they will always happen when it isn’t convenient.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s true. Well, you’d best get ready for work.”

“Why don’t you come down and have breakfast? Maybe you’ll feel better.”

Fiona nodded, and reluctantly pulled herself out of bed.

Fiona had some toast and her morning tea, and as she and Clive talked, she started to feel more like herself. Clive still insisted that she stay at home and rest. “Promise me, darling, that you won’t go out anywhere today.”

Fiona looked at him. “Why not?”

“You almost fainted last night. We don’t know why you were sick all of the sudden, but I don’t want you out alone, fainting away in some public place.”

“Yeah, OK. I’ll be at home.”

Clive smiled, and kissed her. “That’s my good girl. I’ll see you later.”

Fiona watched Clive leave. She sat down on the sofa, and felt rather uneasy. She could not put her finger on why, but something just didn't seem right about the whole thing. At that moment, her phone rang. It was Vivian.

"Hey doll, how was the exhibition?"

"It went very well, thanks. What the heck happened to you?"

"God, Vivian, I don't even know. I came home from work, feeling fine. Clive said I looked pale, but I didn't notice that. Clive made me a cup of tea to help me wake up, then I went to get showered. While I was in the shower, I got very dizzy, and almost passed out. Clive happened to come upstairs and caught me in time. Then I got so sleepy that I couldn't get up out of bed."

"Fiona, that is really weird, I must say."

"You're not kidding. What kind of virus acts like that?"

"No virus that I know of; it almost sounds like you took something or ate something that did that to you."

Fiona frowned. "I can't think of a single thing that I ate or drank that would make me sleepy."

"What about that tea Clive gave you?"

"It was just regular tea. Come to think of it, it tasted a little odd. Maybe something is off about it. Or maybe my taste buds were off. It's hard to know."

"Fiona, can I say something to you without you getting angry with me?"

"Of course. What is it?"

Vivian chose her words carefully. "I get the really strong feeling that your husband did not want you to come to the exhibition."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, the fact that he called me and asked me who would be there. If he's not looking to meet up with anyone, why would he care? He got very weird when I mentioned that Jack was going to be there."

"Yes, I know. He actually mentioned that to me, asking if I really wanted to end up seeing him there."

"I thought so."

"What does that have to do with this, though?"

"Well, look—don't you see a pattern?"

Fiona was confused. "No. Enlighten me."

"Every time we want to go out, or you want to go out without him, something happens. Either he's sick, or some wacky thing goes wrong in your house, or he manages to talk you out of going, or..."

“...Or?”

“Look, I don’t know what happened yesterday, and I don’t want to accuse him of anything, God knows...”

“You think that Clive might have drugged me?”

“Well...yes, I think that’s possible.”

Fiona was silent for a moment. “Oh, I don’t know Vivian. I agree it’s weird, and that Clive has been a little weird these days, but I think that’s over the top for him.”

“I do hope you’re right.”

“I just can’t imagine him doing something like that.”

They talked for a few more minutes. After hanging up the phone, Fiona sat down and thought.

Going out without my permission. She remembered the phrase. She looked down at her chest, and saw the remains of the bite marks.

This is why I’m uneasy. Vivian is right—there is a pattern here. I don’t know if Clive drugged me or not, but something is still wrong...

She had no idea what she wanted to do about it. She had the perfect marriage, after all. There was nothing she could specifically point to, no glaring transgression that she could confront him with. All she had was speculation regarding last night

And she had to admit, she was afraid to find out if Vivian was right.

Clive came home at his usual time, and asked her how she was feeling. She managed to smile and make conversation, but she now had this growing unease that she had a hard time fighting. She knew she would have to talk about it, but she didn’t know how. Clive seemed increasingly stressed lately, which may have been why he was hanging on her so much. *I really hope that’s all there is to this...*

Fiona was back to work on Monday. Clive had to work a little later, so she went home ahead of him to run some errands and make dinner. She took a walk down to the grocery store to pick up a few things. As she was walking down towards the store, she saw someone walking towards her that she recognized.

My eyesight must be getting bad, she thought. *I can’t quite see who that is...*

As the person approached her, she realized who it was—Jack.

Jack was usually in a fog, but he stopped when he saw her. She pretended not to see him, but he touched her shoulder and called out to her.

“Oh. Hi, Jack. What brings you to London?”

“I do come down here now and again, don’t I?”

She shrugged. "I suppose."

He looked at her. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to the grocery store, then I've got to get home."

"Do you fancy stopping for a drink with me?"

"Thanks, Jack, but I really can't."

"Oh, come on lass. It wouldn't be long."

She sighed. "No, I really can't. I have so much to do this evening, and Clive would have a fit."

Jack laughed mockingly. "That wanker keeping you in?"

She turned sharply, "Don't you talk about my husband that way."

Jack whistled. "Aren't we defensive?"

"You're not going to stand here and insult Clive. I love him, not that it matters to you."

"Do you really?"

"Yes. Really."

"Fiona, I'm sorry. I just don't GET it. I can't believe it."

"Well, you don't need to. Now, I've got to get a move on."

She quickly moved past him, and went into the store. Jack stared after her for a few moments, then walked away, shaking his head. Fiona went into the store, not noticing her husband standing across the street. Clive had been coming home at the moment Fiona had run into Jack, and stood paralyzed while watching them. He stood trembling for a few minutes, and then pulled himself together and walked home.

When he got home, Fiona was there, and had supper ready. As they had their dinner, Clive waited for her to mention her encounter with Jack. She didn't.

That night both of them went straight to bed. Fiona had wanted to take a break from having sex, as she felt Clive was too stressed out, and being too rough with her as a consequence. She wanted him to chill out a bit—if he hurt her too much, she knew she would close herself off, and not be able to enjoy sex with him. Clive had agreed, but he was terribly distressed. Their lovemaking had always been passionate and interesting, and he was not sure how he could relieve his stress without it.

All night he lay awake, his paranoia taunting him like a demon. By morning he had managed to convince himself that Jack was planning to rape her, just to get back at him. He would pressure her into going out with him for drinks, and then eventually she would be nice and give in just to get him off her back...and that would be it.

He would have to do something about that.

Saturday was a busy day for Fiona—she had articles to write, and a ton of prep work for her classes. Clive agreed to go into town to take care of some of their regular errands. Before he did that, he headed over to one of the sex shops in London. He found what he was looking for—a chastity belt. He was actually trembling and dizzy as he purchased it. *There is NO way Fiona is going to go for this...* The little demon in his mind had grown disproportionately, however, and he was convinced that this was the only way he was going to save her. She would just have to deal with it.

Clive was very tense when the two of them went to bed that night. Fiona noticed it, and could not avoid commenting on it.

“Clive, what is wrong, for God’s sake? You look like you’re about to explode.”

Clive let out a long breath. He then looked at her. “You didn’t tell me something about this past Monday.”

Fiona looked at him quizzically. “What happened this past Monday?”

“You know.”

“No, I’m sorry, I don’t.”

“You went down to the grocery store.”

“So? Is that a crime now?”

“AND you ran into Jack on the way.”

“How do you know that?”

“I just do.”

“Clive, for chrissakes, you make it sound like I planned to run into him. I have no idea why he’s hanging around. Anyway I blew him off. He wasn’t worth mentioning.”

“Darling, you must tell me these things. You don’t know how much danger you’re in.”

Fiona’s eyes widened. “What in the world are you talking about? What danger?”

“Fiona, he’s going to keep pestering you until he can get you alone. Don’t think he won’t try to do anything.”

Fiona just stared at Clive. *Oh my God. He’s losing his mind.* For the first time ever in their relationship, she felt scared of her husband.

“Clive...sweetheart...um, can you tell me exactly why you think Jack would do such a thing? Jack has trouble getting himself dressed in the morning. How do you think he has the mental coordination to do such a thing?”

“You underestimate him, Fiona.”

“Mm-hmm. And how exactly do you know this is going to happen?”

“I just do.”

Fiona sighed. “Well Clive—technically speaking, anything can happen to anyone at any time. I can’t live my life in fear that Jack is plotting something”.

“Well, I’m your husband, and it’s my job to protect you from that. What kind of a husband would I be if I were to allow that to happen?”

“Clive, this is ridiculous.”

“No it’s not.”

“Well what are you going to do about it?”

“I’ll show you. Lay down.”

“Why? What are you going to do?”

“Just do what I tell you.”

She eyed him warily, uncertain of what he planned to do. Clive then picked her up, lay her on her stomach, and tied her hands behind her back. She let out a shriek. He turned her over and pushed a handkerchief into her mouth. He then took out the chastity belt. She stared at it wide eyed, and began her muffled protest. Clive ignored her. He pulled her knickers off, wrapped the leather belt around her, tightened it, and fastened the lock. He then walked off with the key. When he returned, he did not have the key with him.

He leaned over her. “Are you going to behave? I’m not going to untie you unless you do.”

She nodded.

Clive then untied her hands and pulled the gag from her mouth. She shrank from him.

Clive looked at her, with desperation in his face. “Darling, I’m sorry. I didn’t want to do that to you. Please don’t be angry. This is for your own good.”

Fiona stared at him, quaking. “Clive, I am NOT going to wear this thing. Take it off of me! Where is the goddamned key??”

“I’ve put it away. It’s for me to have. It’s protecting my property.”

“Clive, my body is NOT your property! What the fuck is wrong with you? Have you lost your mind?”

He pulled her close to him, and put his finger on her lips. “Hush darling. You’re upset.”

“Of course I’m upset, you moron!”

“Calm down. It will be fine. Once I know he’s gone away and you’re safe, I’ll take it off again.”

“Clive you have no idea...I cannot walk around in this thing for days!”

"You'll get used to it."

"Clive!"

"Enough. Come to bed."

Clive lay her back down in bed, and told her to go to sleep. But she did not sleep. She didn't know what to do.

Should I call the police? What he's doing is criminal...

But I love Clive. This is not the same Clive I married. I don't know who this is...

And if I antagonize him too much, I don't know what's next...

He's gone crazy. He's plumb gone crazy. He's really convinced himself that this is what he should do.

I have to get out of here. But I have to do it carefully...

Fiona slept fitfully that night. The next day they got up and went about their business as usual, but she was more subdued, and barely spoke. To say that the belt was inconvenient and annoying to her daily routine was an understatement. *I have to find the damn key...*

Clive had gone upstairs to get some things before they left for the day. While he was upstairs, she grabbed his key ring. She spotted the belt key on there. *So he's keeping it there. I don't dare take it off right now...* She placed the keys on the counter. She would have to wait until later.

When they got home that afternoon, Fiona went to make tea, but noticed they'd run out of milk. "I need to go down to the store again," she told Clive. Before he could answer, the phone rang. It was a business related call for Clive. He put his hand over the receiver. "I have to take this," he said. "Why don't you run and get the milk?" She nodded. He left the room.

I have a golden opportunity.

Clive had taken the phone upstairs. She went over to his keychain, and carefully removed the belt key. Then, grabbing her own purse, she ran down to the store. Next to the grocery store was a hardware store. It took a matter of minutes to duplicate the key. She hurried back home. When she got in, Clive was still on the phone. She slipped the original key back on his key ring, and kept the other hidden in her purse.

Perfect.

She made dinner, and tried to behave normally. She was certain that she was overdoing it, but she really wanted to put Clive off his guard. She had discovered earlier that day that Clive was tracking all of her cell phone calls, and had tried to hack into her e-mail. He was too aware of all of her movements, so she had to be careful. After dinner, Clive picked up his key ring and examined it. He looked satisfied when he saw the key was still there. He went over to Fiona and put his arms around her. She jumped

involuntarily.

“It will be all right, darling, I promise,” he whispered to her. But he felt very sad. He could feel the barrier between them. He wanted things to be the way they were before.

The next day, Clive had to go to work, but Fiona was off. She assured Clive that she would be home all day, as she still had a lot of work to do. She watched him pull away to go to work. Once she was sure he was gone, she immediately found the duplicate belt key, and released herself from the hated contraption. She then got her suitcase out, and began packing. *I can't take much, only things I really need.*

It wasn't a far walk to the train station, and within an hour, Fiona was there. She then bought a ticket to Bath Spa. She paced nervously until the train arrived. By 11:00 that morning, she was on her way. She shut off her mobile phone.

Around noon, Clive called home to check on her. He was annoyed that she did not answer her phone. He then called the house phone, and got no answer. *What the hell is going on? Now she's not answering my calls? Or did she go out when she promised not to?*

Clive was irritable and agitated the rest of the day. He was anxious to get home, to find out what was going on. He called Fiona several more times, leaving messages, but still no answer. His irritation was now turning to panic.

He raced home after work, and opened the door, calling out to her. No answer. The house was dark. He went through the house, flipping on lights, checking all the rooms. He began opening all doors frantically. When he got to their bedroom, he opened the closet, and found the chastity belt on the floor. He was dumbfounded. *How did she get it off?* Looking around, something seemed off. He opened her drawers—most of her clothes were missing. He went into the bathroom—all of her toiletries were gone. His heart was pounding. Then he went downstairs, and found the letter.

Clive sank into a chair in the kitchen, picked up the letter, and began to read:

Dear Clive,

As you will have noticed by now, I've left. I'm not saying that I've left for good—I haven't decided that yet. But I need to get away from here—I need to think, and I need some distance from you.

To say that you are not yourself is a gross understatement. I don't know what's happened—we had the perfect marriage. I love you more than anything in this world. Now I'm scared to death of you. I can't even think of coming back even to talk unless I know it's safe. Right now, it's definitely not safe.

If you don't understand—you should. Tracking my calls and movements, trying to stop me from going out with my friends, drugging me (I suspect), and the last straw—trying to keep me in a chastity belt.

You've become violent and totally unreasonable. This is not the Clive I know and love.

I'm not telling you where I'm at, and for safety, I've not told anyone else either, so there is no need to call any of my friends or family. I will call you when I feel ready. In the meantime, I hope this is a wake-up call to you, and that you are prepared to do what it takes to fix whatever the hell is wrong here.

I'm sorry it has to be this way Clive.

Love,

Fiona

Clive put the letter down. His whole body started trembling violently. Then he broke out into tears. The initial numbness that he felt was lifting and there was nothing but pain. *Oh God, I've screwed up—I've screwed up so badly...how could I have let myself get this out of control?*

He struggled to breathe, he was sobbing so much. He put his head in his hands. What the hell am I going to do?

He pulled himself up and went into the parlor, collapsing on the sofa. He just stared up at the ceiling, tears pouring down his cheeks. He picked up his cell phone, and called Fiona's number. No answer. He left her a message, begging her to call him. An hour went by, and nothing. He called again. He just couldn't accept the fact that she was not going to talk to him.

Finally he knew he had to call someone else—he needed help. But who would he call? He finally decided to call his brother James.

When James heard his brother on the phone, he was immediately concerned. "Clive, what the hell is wrong?"

"Fiona..."

"Is she all right?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"She left." Clive then burst into sobs again.

"Whoa, Clive, calm down. What do you mean she left?"

"She left," he repeated in a whisper.

"Hang on over there—I'm coming over."

Within about 15 minutes, James arrived at Clive's house. Clive had left the door unlocked, so he went in to find his brother in a horrible state. He had never seen Clive look this bad.

"Good God, Clive—look, take some deep breaths, try to get a hold of yourself. You're going to have a

heart attack if you don't."

"My God, James, what am I going to do without her? I don't think I could live..."

"Clive, stop that. Let's back up. What happened? Did you two have a row?"

Clive pointed to the kitchen table. James turned around. He went over to the kitchen table, and found the letter Fiona had written. After reading through it, he looked up at his brother, wide-eyed.

"Clive, is this stuff she's writing true?"

Clive closed his eyes.

"Is it??"

Clive nodded.

"What the hell is wrong with you? Why did you do those things? Did you expect her to stay if you were doing that?"

Clive winced. "I...I don't know why. I knew it was wrong. Rationally, I knew. But some part of me was just so scared—still is scared. I've been so deathly afraid that she'll either run off with someone, or get raped."

"Clive, what happened to make you think that?"

"Well—not much. Fiona has always been faithful. Her ex-boyfriend has been around lately, and even though she's blown him off, I worry that he'll do something."

"That's all?"

"Yeah, that's all."

James gave a deep sigh. "Clive, I'm really concerned about you. Fiona was perfect for you in every way. It's like some perverse thing has made you screw everything up."

Clive stared at the wall. "Yeah, that's exactly what it's like. Like...I can't possibly be happy. I have to be miserable. Something has to be wrong. But I'm not satisfied when things are wrong, either."

James straightened up. "Well, look, I'm going to try to call her."

Clive looked up anxiously. "Oh, please do. I've tried...she won't return my calls."

"I can't say I'm surprised." James walked out of the parlor and dialed Fiona's number. No answer, only voice mail. James left her a message.

"I'm not getting her, either. Look Clive, the letter doesn't say she's given up on you, just that she needs to think. Maybe I can talk to her. But you seriously need professional help—I'm not going to be able to convince her to come back unless you do, I'm fairly sure of that."

Clive nodded slowly, as if he half-comprehended what James was saying.

“You realize she could have called the police on you.”

Clive groaned. “Don’t remind me of that, please.”

“Well you’d better think about it! I agree with her, this isn’t like you at all. You need to check yourself into a mental rehab somewhere.”

Clive closed his eyes. “People will know what happened if I do that.”

“They don’t have to know—I’m sure we could make up an excuse. But you’d better think about it. In the meantime, I’m staying here with you tonight, and I’m calling Dave to come over as well.” Dave was Clive’s best friend, and knew he would help him out.

James also called Clive’s doctor, saying he had a breakdown, and could anything be prescribed to help him sleep. The prescription was called in, and when James called Dave, he had him pick up the prescription as well. Once Clive was sedated and in bed, the two men went downstairs so James could fill Dave in on what happened. Both men were in disbelief at the turn of events.

As they were talking, James felt his phone vibrate. He looked at the caller ID—it was Fiona. He answered the phone.

“Fiona! Where are you?”

“I’d rather not say right now. Is Clive with you?”

“No, he’s upstairs sleeping—the doctor prescribed some sedatives for him.”

“That’s funny, I’m sure he has some in the house.”

“Fiona what is going on? We saw your note. I asked him if he did the things you mentioned, and he said yes.”

“Well, that’s just it, James. I’m scared to death of him. I’m also really unhappy, because I love him. I really don’t want to leave him, but he’s too unstable right now.”

“Fiona, can I meet you somewhere to talk? How far away are you?”

She paused. “Quite far.”

“Well, is there some halfway point I could meet you at tomorrow? I can have Dave stay with Clive.”

“Yeah, OK.”

The two agreed to meet in Reading, after James swore to Fiona that he would not tell Clive about their meeting. The next day, James met up with her at a room in a hotel across from the train station. He noticed that she looked tired, and she admitted that she hadn’t slept very well. Taking a deep breath, she began to relate the story of what happened to James. By the time she finished, he stared at her open mouthed.

“I’m really surprised you didn’t call the police. That was just insane.”

“Well, yes it was. Insane is the proper word. It’s not like Clive. I keep telling myself that. I want to be able to love and trust him again.”

“Look—I’ve asked Clive to check into a psychiatric facility, and he’s agreed. Will you come back to your home if he does that?”

Fiona sighed. “Yes, I think I would. But I really need to be involved in that...he needs to figure out his own issues, but they’re our issues as well.”

James went back to London. He admitted to Clive that he’d met up with Fiona.

Clive sat up. “Oh God, why didn’t you tell me? What did she say?”

“She says she’ll come back if you go for psychiatric care. But she wants to be involved in your therapy, too.”

“Fine, fine. I’ll do whatever it takes.”

So, it was arranged. Clive took a sick leave from work and went to a psychiatric hospital. Fiona returned immediately to London. Clive was very nervous when he went into the facility—he did not like having to stay in such a place, and he desperately wanted to see Fiona. When she finally came to see him, he was overjoyed when she came over and held him.

“Oh darling, I’m so glad you’re giving me another chance.”

She smiled at him. “I told you I would. But there’s a lot to work out here.”

He nodded. He looked down, and then up at her again, thoughtfully.

“I guess we don’t have the perfect marriage anymore.”

“No, I guess we don’t. Maybe we can be happy now.”

They both laughed.

© 2011 Brigid Burke