

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

She'd tried her hand

by Sue Hitchcock

She'd tried her hand at most things, but drew the line at honesty.

When do women start to keep secrets from their men? Why from day one of course! We hide our secretions , excretions and indiscretions too.

Dennis and Val had been in love in the beginning. Of course Dennis knew that Val had been rather promiscuous, he was a recipient of her favours himself and it was she who had initiated him to the joy of sex. Their relationship had been thwarted by Val's father, who blamed him for the intimacy he had found out about when they were staying at his house. She had to choose between parents and lover and at nineteen wasn't ready for full commitment. So four years went by, both living unsatisfactory lives, before they reestablished their relationship and got married.

Dennis had been aware of Val's relationships in the intervening years but had remained celibate himself. So he congratulated himself on his forgiving nature, knowing he was not guilty. Val, on the other hand had been brought up by her religious parents to examine her own behaviour and had never felt free of guilt. This was the background of their life.

Now, in old age, the greatest misdemeanors in Val's life were the substitution of non-organic ingredients in her shopping, when a particular dish required it. Dennis was quite capable of taking something back to the shop, if he spotted it, but mostly he was too lazy and preferred to revel in his superiority.

“We're not buying organic for the sake of our own health, at our age!”

“All the more reason! We don't want to poison the wildlife!”
“You take it back, then!”
“Maybe later, I'm just listening to the news.”

Val carried on cutting up the aubergine, knowing she would not be bothered again and anyway, how could you make moussaka without one. It was one of his favourite dishes, so he would eat it with relish.

Working alone in the kitchen she could indulge her own tastes and loved to turn on the radio and listen to music which reminded her of her wicked youth, jazz programmes with Miles Davis and Charlie Parker.

Conversations were becoming rarer between them. Only current affairs had any significance to them both and even then Dennis would prefer to make his own opinions known rather than listen to the whole item on the News. It was only his increased dependence on subtitles which made it bearable.

“You really should get a hearing aid, Dennis!”

“In a minute, the ads will come on soon...”

“We'll have the neighbours complaining if you have it on loud and those subtitles are rubbish. They don't even get the language right, sometimes!”

“Don't start! You know my mother's hearing aid whistled all the time. I'm not having one!”

So silence began to fall on the guilty and not-guilty alike.

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So Many Children

by Sue Hitchcock

“How did I end up here?” thought Zeinab. Here she was with seven children in one and a half floors of the flat above the shop, her mother-in-law occupying two rooms on the first floor. “A fat lot of use she is!” thought Zeinab, “She doesn't speak English and she can't drive.”

When Zeinab and Ahmed had married, she had been happy, even though it was an

arranged marriage. She had known Ahmed at primary school and she had found him gentle and bright. They had been given one floor over the shop, which Ahmed's father owned and which Ahmed and his younger brother ran between them. It was assumed she would do her share of the work too.

Zeinab and Ahmed were very proud as their family grew, especially of their three boys, though their daughter was amazing too. Ahmed's brother, Yusef, got married too, but they lived round the corner. On a Friday the women ran the shop while Ahmed and Yusef went to the mosque, though Zeinab thought Sana was a bit of a liability, as she brought her three children, all under five years and played with them most of the time.

When Ahmed's father died, his mother had moved out of two of her rooms and Yusef and his family moved in. It made sense, as the men had to take over collecting stock from the cash-and-carry, unloading it and doing the accounts. The wives took turns in minding the shop, taking the children to school and minding the little ones.

Then, horror of horrors! The devout Ahmed and Yusef announced they were going to join ISIS. Zeinab and Sana wept and argued with them all night to no avail. Sana never stopped crying and became totally useless. Zeinab had to shut up the shop.

With the help of her mother-in-law minding the babies, she got the children to school and cleaned and cooked as normal. There was money in the shop bank account, although her signature had not been authorized and that began to dwindle away as bills got paid.

Gradually they started eating the crisps and chocolate from the shop, but most of the stock was inedible – cigarettes and magazines. Finally Zeinab went to the food bank, but it seemed you needed a voucher from Social Services. Social Services asked where her husband was and she couldn't answer.

She went home. All she could find was a couple of pot noodles, which she tipped into a saucepan with a lot of water. That night all the children went to bed hungry and crying, while Zeinab looked through the local paper for a cleaning job.

There was an old woman,
 who lived in a shoe.
She had so many children,
 she didn't know what to do.
She gave them some broth,
 without any bread,
Then whipped them all soundly
 and sent them to bed.