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Unrequited

by Des Holden

He lay in the dark and stared towards the invisible ceiling. Had he gone to Mass earlier in the day? The not knowing spiralled tightly in his head and chest. Had he bought the Mail on Sunday, had he done the sudoku?

The bedside clock said a quarter to eleven in large blue numbers. His fingers spidered to the switch on his lamp then thumbed through his diary. Thursday. Why had he thought it was Sunday? Had he forgotten to fill the diary for three days? That would be unusual he thought, and checked a few weeks for other lapses. There were none.

Thursday. Nice walk. Nice, big lunch. Bath.

He turned the light out. Why couldn't he sleep? He groped for the plastic dish, empty. He'd taken his pills, no more till morning. The half full glass of water was next to the dish, which was empty he reminded himself. He shouldn't drink this late, he might need the bathroom and Mary sometimes got upset if he woke her up. She was so good to him now that he was not well.

He lay in the dark with stomach ache. Did he need the toilet? Would the feeling pass off if he waited? He would probably be getting up soon anyway; get ready for church. He could buy the paper on the way home and do the sudoku. The pain wasn't passing off. The bottle he should use had fallen over once and he thought Mary had been upset. She was so good to him, it was awful to make extra work for her. She was one in a million. He opened the curtains and enough light came in from the well lit cul-de-sac that he could see his bedroom door. He must not turn his lamp on and open the door. It was a rule. Mary needed her sleep too. The bathroom was seven steps away.

"It's not time to wake up Des. It's night time. Go back to bed. You've been to the toilet. Go back to bed now Des."

Her voice was kind in the darkness. As he turned back to his room the ache in his tummy disappeared.

“Can I have a drink of my water?” He asked the night. There was a moment’s pause.

“Go back to bed. It's the middle of the night. Go to sleep.”

He closed the bedroom door behind him, pulled the curtains and groped back into bed. He lay and looked for the ceiling.

Much later Mary let herself into the bungalow and sat in the small lounge with a glass of yesterday, no, the day before’s Malbec.

‘My first of the day!’ she thought. She noticed the alert on her phone. The Alexa had worked as the young doctor and nurse had said it would, but she didn't like the machine sitting there spying on her.

In the dark Des called out to her.

It had been her daughter’s suggestion but really now she thought he should be in a nursing home. Better for everyone.