



Pasta Aisle

by Richard Wilding

I don't know why seeing them there, at least apparently happy, put me in mind of our first quarrel because I rarely think of her at all but the waking brain, just like the sleeping one, has a mind of its own. Anyway, there we were in the pasta and rice aisle in Morrisons doing our weekly big shop when out of nowhere she said, "You're an arsehole to work with and you're turning into an arsehole to live with." I stood up – I had been bending down looking for penne, Morrison's Own Brand because why pay more? They usually kept it on the lower shelves.

"What?" I kept my body language calm. To the woman with her four council house children squabbling with each other there would have been no outward sign that I was troubled. I have a fine poker face, although having never *actually* played poker this has yet to be put to the test. She, on the other hand, was already red. Her neck was flushed – a sure sign that something was troubling her. It wasn't her sex flush, I was at least confident of that. That was in the cheeks.

"Everyone says it. Behind your back." Her voice was thin and hard. Like spaghetti.

"At the bank?!" This was laughable. They loved me there.

“You don’t listen to anyone. You never let others speak unless it’s to blow smoke up your arse and when you’re not pushing way better people than you out of the way you’ve got your nose so hard up the boss’s arse I’m surprised you can still breath. You’re a fuck up is what you are.” The council house randoms stopped squabbling and turned to look at their mother, who gave us both glare of disapproval (why she glared at me I have no idea) and hurried the kids along to tinned tomatoes and the ‘past sell by date’ items.

“Is it the time of the month?”

“Oh, Christ, just fuck off!” she shouted at me and this time everyone in the aisle turned to have a look. A tannoy announced that someone was needed at check out twelve. Someone would soon be needed in the pasta aisle if this carried on.

“So it is the time of the month. Let’s just pay up and go.”

She stood there, staring at me like she hated me. Where this had come from I couldn’t hazard a guess. I’m usually pretty intuitive with these kinds of things. We’d been on a project together at the bank – my idea, as it happens. A way to get customers to spend more time in the branch – the longer they stay, the more they’ll want to buy. And it had been a bit tense here and there but that sort of thing happens when your underlings don’t do it the way you want it done and I didn’t want to have to do it all over again – I had better things to be doing – but in the end I had to and it would have taken too much time and let’s face it grief to explain why I was changing it so I just went ahead and made it the way it should have been at the start. Maybe it was that?