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The Women Who Tried

by Garf Collins

“It’s never going to happen at this rate,” Brittany shouted at the wall in frustration. She had just come from a fractious meeting with her family. It was well established that any important decision whoever it affected had to be openly discussed. They were often very forthright in their opinions. “They’ve all got different ideas of what I should do,” she wailed. “It’s no different to the way it all started,” she thought as she remembered the varying opinions of the family back then.

“You’ve got to get away from that man,” her father had said, “Helmut tells you what to do all the time. You have no personal freedom. He lets all his friends come and go whenever they like. And they’re a mixed lot. You end up having to look after them. You contribute money to the household and he decides how to spend it anyway he likes. You have practically no say at all. You’d be far better off without him.”

“Hang on Joe,” her mother had said. I know there are lots of problems but that’s marriage for you. Don’t forget Brittany’s got a nice house in a good district and even though Helmut’s a bit extravagant, she’s comfortably off. I don’t think she’s as worried about the comings and goings as she used to be, either. She could really lose out if she leaves.”

The argument had raged on. Her brother and sister were also on opposite sides. Brittany felt as if she had no influence on the matter at all. But then she had put her foot down.

“What I’m going to do is to tell Helmut I want a separation and see if we can agree what we then do amicably.”

That had been two years earlier. She and Helmut had met many times since. The negotiation was far more difficult than she had imagined. To start with he wanted her to pay for the mortgage on the house. "After all you committed to pay your share when we bought the house," he had said. "Now you want it all to yourself so it's only fair you pay. I'm going to have to pay for the French house." Then there were the arrangements for the children. He laid down a strict rota and said he would only agree to changing it when the children were old enough to come and go as they pleased. Added to which, he had insisted that he wouldn't discuss any financial support until those basic items were agreed.

Naturally this had been put to the family tribunal. Over many fraught sessions they couldn't agree what she should do. Her father had said, "If that's what he wants, just walk away. Refuse any payments. Don't allow any access to the children. You'll have the whip hand. He won't want the house repossessed. He'd lose his share along with you."

"I think you'd be daft to do that," her mother had said. "It will be a very difficult situation. He would bring all sorts of law suits. He might even grab the children and take them to France. You wouldn't know what to expect from one moment to the next. Plus, you said you wanted freedom from him. There'd be no chance of that."

Although she chaffed at, in effect, being subject to a family veto, Brittany really wanted their backing. "Mum would be so worried if I just told him to go to hell, I would much rather she supported me," she thought. "Perhaps by the time we get together next month, I could have persuaded her it would be for the best."

So Brittany put off agreeing to Helmut's proposed terms for their separation, hoping to first achieve the agreement of her family.