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## Gaslighter

by Jane Reynolds

When Maria met Mike he was handsome, strong and successful. He helped her around the house, without being asked. Doing things she couldn't do on her own.

The 70 mile distance between them meant he had to leave things at her place, for the next time. Razors, changes of clothes, hair gel, toothbrush.

He would always bring gifts, and sent them. Beautiful, expensive. So many. Too many.

He could see she was struggling so he offered to pay the mortgage. Two incomes were better than one.

But a Monday morning soon after, she found him lying on her sofa. Stretched out so long she couldn't even sit down. She asked whether he was going to work. He said he didn't have any.

"I don't understand," she said. "You told me you did."

He shook his head. "I just needed to know if you were just a gold-digger. And now I can see that you are. I see how your eyes have changed when you look at me."

That night when she got home from work there was a gift on her pillow. "I love you, darling," read the label.

Over the next few weeks, stubble covered his face and his hair grew long and greasy. She wondered about the razors that he'd left in her bathroom and his hair gel on her dressing table. He lay on her sofa, in the same track suit from day to day. She wondered about the changes of clothes he had hung in her wardrobe.

When she asked why he didn't look for work, he said she knew he was looking; that he'd told her multiple times. But she couldn't recall that. When she said he was being hurtful, he asked why she could only see things from her own point of view.

That night there was a present on her pillow. "Sorry," said the label.

When she pleaded at him to leave her alone he reminded her how lucky she was that someone could put up with her nagging mouth and crooked nose. T

hat night there was a bottle of perfume on her pillow. "I love you, beautiful," read the label.

When she told him to get out of her house he said it was his house. When she screamed that it wasn't, he showed her the papers to prove that it was. His name on her mortgage statement. Then he smashed her head against the wall and stuffed the paperwork in her mouth.

She woke in a hospital. A doctor was peering into her eyes.

"Mandy?" he asked.

Who is Mandy, she thought. Her name was Maria.

"Welcome back," he smiled "You've been in a coma for quite a while."

"How did I get here?" she asked.

"Your husband brought you in."

"I don't have a husband," she replied.

"Don't worry," the doctor nodded. "A little amnesia is common after a head injury. He also left you this present for when you woke up."