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## Modern Love

by Janie Reynolds

As she walked away after thirty years of marriage, she called back to you.

“Next time, choose someone simple.”

You sat there, in solitary silence, a numb body in an empty flat, and, ‘Yes,’ you thought, ‘she had been very complex. Woody Allen style.’

And then, as you weathered the seasons alone, each night your flesh tautened and dried a little tighter, like a drumskin left in a desert. You shortened and widened as your muscles clenched and tightened at the thought of it all, and your shallowing breaths invented a lesser life. The gripping in your heart had spread across your chest and up your neck until you could hold it no longer and, in the secret of the small hours, you allowed yourself to cry. And the gnawing in your deepest belly, the one you knew from your youth, you couldn’t help but blame her for.

Within a half a year you were holding your head up high. Still carrying the poison within, but with the honour befitting a king. Her little messages came from across the Atlantic. How were you? She wanted the best for you. She would always love you, but not like that. Those words weren’t new. She hadn’t desired you for a decade, and your body still lay crushed, like a written off car. Nothing moved and nothing breathed. Nothing pumped and nothing opened. You were so ashamed, you wrapped yourself up in cardboard, like a drunk hiding a bottle of gin.

But as a year passed, you decided it was all actually completely perfect. You rejoiced that it had not been violent. That she had been kind to you and you to her, and you watched as your children smiled and hugged you, and then her, and even if across the ocean, you felt proud that you were still a family.

And now you began to feel the sun on your skin and could hear the sound of the waves. You picked up pebbles along the beach and, in them, saw fortunes and fonder memories.

Kambo Now spread wildly via facebook and faces appeared at your door, asking for their heavy loads to be lifted. Faces, faces, a sea of innocent faces, filled the spaces on your floor, and sometimes in your mind, and you watched in awe as the medicine surged through their bodies like a heaven-sent antidote. While they purged their burdens at your feet, you purged along side them, vomiting a sea of venom into your bucket.

But, despite the Frog, at the end of each day, you took to your double bed alone, the cardboard box, stacked high for the night on the shelf of your penthouse flat. 'I am robust of body and steely of mind' you thought. 'But where is the cure for my heartbreak?'

So you turned, instead, to the online sea of hearts, where hundreds of them, like yours, pumped brightly in a sea of blushing hope. As you donned your bathing costume, your imagination could finally run free.

"Choose someone simple," she whispered.

You dived in, soon finding yourself in a shoal of eager bait. You fired off inquiring words and searched under their scales for something special. But your complexities and achievements went unrecognised. Your enquiring mind went unchallenged. Their silky smooth surfaces slid and slipped over your bumpy, barnacled surface.

But then, just as you were ready to get out, and hang your battered bathing gear to dry, you saw her. A pretty little fish, with multicoloured protrusions, deep green eyes and a changing face. Your huge eyes couldn't blink for the dazzling array, as she swam towards you, biting her lip seductively. 'What is happening?' you thought, as you felt her finger-like projections bore holes through your armour and lock on to your spiky edges like superglue.

'I think I have found her!' your heart rejoiced.

'But she is not simple,' whispered the voice. 'Look at all those fancy projections and the ever-changing faces.'

And though you feared the voice was true, you peered down at the holes and cracks, the ridges and spikes that covered you and you knew that you yourself weren't simple either. 'The other ones just bounced off me like water off a duck's back,' you thought. 'I will go for this spiky one covered in projections. It feels like home.'

So you swam towards her, brimming with hope.

"Here is my heart," you said.

"But, you don't look like I expected you to look like," scorned the pretty little fish. And she started to swim a little distance from you.

“And you are not perfect if you can say that to me!” you said back. And then you plunged a jagged blade of coral right into your own belly, and, eyes still unblinking at hers, twisted it deeper and deeper until all you could do was turn and swim away.

As you swam, she called to you.

“How can you blame me for not being perfect when I have not had you to show me how?”

But you swam and you swam, as fast as you could, until you reached the land. You knew you had left her in a sea of troubles, to float alone and pine and grieve for her twin, but you kept on swimming.

But then what happened was a surprise. You found that you were loose and moist. Your breaths were deep and easy and your muscles hard and strong. Your chest was wide and your heart was open. The dark holes in your skin had been filled by a myriad of rainbow projections that glistened in the sunlight. You were afraid but you felt more alive than you had since a child. It was painful and complicated but the sickness had gone.

So you turned sharply around and thrashed your body amongst the waves. Somewhere she was swimming, lonely, in the dark deep sea, not knowing if you would ever find her again, but you would. You could never let her go because she was your antidote.

“I am coming,” you called to the little fish, but by now she had lost her multicoloured projections and was just the colour of the sea.

“Next time, choose someone simple,” whispered the voice.

“No!” you shook your head, fiercely, more alive, courageous and handsome than that voice could ever know.

(to be continued?)