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## Sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all

by Rosalyn Hurst

When the newspapers began to report that the government might enforce a 'lock down' in the coming weeks, Angela and Peter had a hasty discussion about what to do. As usual they came to a rapid and agreeable decision to remain in their newly acquired and jointly owned house. Peter had ordered a hundred bedding plants.

"This will keep me busy all spring," Angela said.

"Whatever you want pet, just being with you is enough for me," replied Peter.

They had met through 'Silver meetings, golden outcomes,' a dating agency for the over 60s run by the Diocese, far safer than internet dating and more likely to attract the right kind of partner. They had married shortly afterwards.

They both, as Peter once said, had the flotsam and jetsam of previous marriages, bringing along with it detritus accrued over many years. Bobbing along the shoreline were their adult children. Though never close friends each set of siblings had known each other for many years, Sean and James even went to the same primary school and Judith and Sarah had been in the same scout group. Although all of them initially had welcomed the divorce proceedings of their parents, they viewed Angela and Peter's marriage with acute suspicion.

"Just live together Mum," James had advised, adding, "have you altered your will?"

For the first year together, Peter and Angela thought they could weather the storm. They managed formal family functions with ease, weekends were allotted to 'his' or 'her' family visits. A weekend was enough, for both secretly acknowledged that their step grandchildren were appalling, no manners, disrespectful at most times, the grandchildren occasionally letting slip such comments such as, "Granddad, Daddy says you have given Angela all your money.' But they laughed it off, saying they never realised how mercenary their children were, that they would always look after each other, and how happy they were with someone so very different from their former spouse.

So when news of a lock down was a certainty, Angela had ventured a suggestion, “perhaps we should think about spending the lock down in Spain?”

They had friends there and it seemed like a good idea. But Peter was shocked.

“I never thought you’d want to get away from your grandchildren,” he said.

Angela thought, but wisely did not say, ‘not mine, yours.’

It took just a week into restrictions for a tiny fissure to appear. From being someone with a role outside the home, Chair of the Rotary, a regular player at the golf club, Peter was bored. Angela too found readjustment hard. She missed the Conservative ladies lunches, sometimes hosted by wives or partners of ministers, she missed the art group, where expertise of any merit was sadly lacking, but where news of the village was exchanged. Left alone with each other, they simultaneously realised that the other was getting more and more like their former partner.

Eventually Angela snapped one day, “must you make that noise when you eat your muesli?”

“What did you say dear?” Peter would say while walking away just like her ex used to. It was the crass replies, the disinterest in what each thought significant.

Week three of lock down, when truly annoyed, both of them would address each other, not as Angela or Peter, but the names of their departed spouse, “for god’s sake Jim will you stop doing that,” and “Sally stop nagging I am going into the garden.”

And all the time their ‘children’ would ring up, refuse to speak to a step parent to briefly enquire how mum or dad was getting on, but without offering any help.

“Seems they are all only interested to see if we are still alive,” Peter said with some irony.

Week four of lock in, found them both viewing it like a prison sentence rather than a public health measure. Angela slowly realised how little she knew of Peter’s former life. He had faced appalling tragedy, death of former wives, one in a traffic incident, the other a suicide off Beachy head. Why, she began to reflect, had this happened?

Peter too had not dissimilar thoughts. ‘How could anyone live with this woman for more than a week?’ Realising that he too did not know her because he had spent so much time away out of the house, pleased that she was so well thought of in the community. In the garden, he tried to remember how exactly Angela’s husband had died, was it before or after the divorce? Probably before because she had inherited a considerable sum on his death. ‘Oh dear,’ he thought.

Five o’clock, day five of week five, Peter and Angela sat in the garden with a cup of tea and a piece of rock hard cake. Listening to the bird song they looked at each other with a smile, a touching of hands.

“We are so lucky Peter, to have each other,” murmured Angela, dispelling thoughts of ending this partnership.

“You are so right,” said Peter with some effort, thinking he was too old to find another.

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