

One Pleasure Leads to Another

by Richard Lewis

She was nineteen looking for a way out, he was forty-three and should have known better.

Katie felt her options were dwindling, her life wasting away in the musty confines of her parents' home. The very fabric of the house emitted the odour of an airless museum, every surface cluttered with ornaments and nick-knacks accumulated over a lifetime. She feared that one day that's where she'd end up, on the shelf gathering dust, her life having passed her by.

The place cried out, 'LEAVE BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.'

The youngest of six children and the only girl, Katie believed that if she stayed she'd end up looking after her parents who were getting old before their time and relying on her more and more. While she prayed for someone to rescue her, Edward languished in a loveless marriage, vulnerable to the attentions of attractive young women.

Edward had made the mistake of committing himself to Fiona at the start of the war, having no idea what lay ahead or how the carnage of the next four years would settle into his bones. He'd been blown from one hell hole to another and witnessed his band of brothers evaporate before his eyes, like the morning mist. Trauma had changed Edward; no longer the carefree young man who'd enlisted a lifetime ago, he'd erected defences, adopting an aloof manner that was hard to penetrate.

After being discharged from the regular army he clung on to his uniform and medals, joining the T.A. and enjoying escaping for weekends to play at soldiering. Edward met Katie at a regimental dinner dance that Fiona had no interest in attending.

It all started with a casual look, held for just seconds longer than was polite. From one brief moment to a timeless beginning. Next he was introducing himself, on the outside cool as Chardonnay, while inside the heart raced like his BSA motorcycle.

Katie responded saying, "I do like a handsome man in uniform."

Starved of attention with a wife who'd lost interest in sex after the children were born, he felt battered by her unreasonable demands and the way she liked to issue him with lists of jobs she wanted done. His heart had long frozen over towards her. In contrast, the seductive warmth of Katie proved irresistible and Edward thought, 'long practice has taught me that one pleasure leads to another.'

"Well are you going to ask me for a dance," Katie purred.

Edward felt the years fall away and echoes of that light-hearted young man he'd once been flowed through every step and into those grateful arms that held her, as they glided across the dance floor.

At first, furtive arrangements were made to meet, taking a hotel room for the night. Their bodies entwined in the aching madness of being in love. But soon this was not enough and Edward found a hideaway in a tiny hamlet, renting a cottage called 'The Guilty Retreat'.

He told Fiona that due to having to travel for work he'd only be home every other weekend. She suspected something was going on but sensed that bringing it to a head might mean losing Edward, so said nothing, hoping it would blow over.

There was an irresistible momentum to the affair and soon Katie was demanding Edward divorce his wife. While he may have been in love with Katie he also felt ashamed at what he'd done and hated himself for living a lie and neglecting his children. He knew that if it came out he'd be met by withering disapproval from the wider family. The thought of his parents disappointment in him and meeting the sadness in his children's eyes was too much to bear.

As time went on the tension became unbearable. Would he face the music and end his marriage or give up Katie and return to an unfulfilled life? The impossible choice paralysed him.

Finally, knowing Edward might never summon up the courage, Katie forced the issue. One late evening Fiona was sitting watching the news when the telephone rang.

"My name is Katie and I'm phoning to let you know that I'm having Edward's baby." It was a cruel lie and certainly brought the matter to a head but left Fiona devastated, to the point that for years into the future she would go into a panic if the phone rang late at night.

One pleasure had led to another, yet for some the heavy cost would be felt for decades to come.