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Sally Burns

by Janie Reynolds

I first had the very unpleasant experience of meeting Sally Burns at mother's funeral. Father was overwhelmed with grief and was about to collapse, right into mother's grave. But Sally Burns frantically held him up under the armpits and stopped him falling.

Naturally, *I* had expected to stand by my own father at the burial of my own mother, but Sally Burns prevented me, saying father was vulnerable and pointing out that, under the covid restrictions, I was from a different household. When I declared that so was she, that's when I discovered she had already moved into The Rectory - the family estate - and was living with father!

Sally Burns had made her way into our lives by posing as a representative for the funeral directors. She appeared at The Rectory the day after mother died with a coffin catalogue. Once in the house, she never left. Phoned through the coffin order and moved in, like a ready-made wife; a 'here's one I prepared earlier' wife.

Well, she may have looked like a wife and acted like a wife but she was *not* his wife. But because father was in the throes of late-onset Alzheimers he either didn't mind or didn't notice. She sat with him at mealtimes, laughed at his jokes, accompanied him on trips in the Jag and I doubt she completely ignored him in the bedroom department. So, what more could a demented old boy possibly have hoped for?

She wasn't attractive, though. Dad was mainly blind so wouldn't have noticed. She had a long nose, the bridge of which widened in the shape of a side-on clothes peg before narrowing into a point above her upper lip. Her eyebrows were dark, despite her head of grey hair, and her small tight eyes coruscated with avarice. Although not much to look at she was something to think about. I've had to have therapy since the court case in which I had to fight to the bone for the home I so love.

God knows how it must have been for poor father, half living in the playground of his childhood, half in the playground Sally Burns had constructed for him.

“Time for your tea, Sir,” announced Pierre, the butler, politely through my study door. “Will master take his tea in the drawing room or the conservatory today?”

I started to get up from my chaise overlooking the deer park, but my conscience started knocking on the back of my head, and I felt waves of nausea, as I do when I think about what I did. Okay, Sally Burns had actually been Dad’s girlfriend for ten years. Okay, she was the love of his life. Okay she was probably quite a nice person. Okay she wasn’t ever a coffin salesperson. But she couldn’t just take my house from me, even if that’s what father wished for. I, the rightful beneficiary, had to retire in the manner in which I had once been accustomed. No girlfriend, no love of father’s life, was going to get in the way. Sally Burns had to go.

I made it quick. A knife into the carotid and you lose consciousness immediately. Pierre was out on errands and no one could possibly find her in grounds as enormous as these.