

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Real Deal

by Ivor John

They sat together in front of the television, though neither of them were watching. He asked about her day, hoping that conversation could relieve the tension, reassure him that they were able to speak together. She knew he wasn't interested in what she had to say. That he would pretend to listen. She couldn't really be bothered to reply, but realised if she didn't it would precipitate another of his passive aggressive arguments. 'Oh what is the matter now Susan?' he would say. 'What am I supposed to have done? I am really trying my best'. His usual solipsistic response. She knew how it would go, the way it always went. She couldn't face that tonight, of all nights.

They both sat looking at the television in deafening silence. Neither of them interested in what they were watching. He felt himself panic as his mobile phone start to vibrate. He was sure his discomfort was obvious, but hoped that she hadn't noticed. Making a trivial comment about the purchase a contestant was making in the TV program. Neither of them were following it, though both pretending to. 'How did buying crap ever become a TV show?'. Really he just wanted to hear that they could still have a conversation. To reassure himself that things were really ok.

It was in his back pocket and so pressed against the sofa cushion. The phone was, as it always was, set on silent, but he had forgotten to cancel vibrate. He knew who the call would be from. Perhaps he could have taken the phone from his pocket and made some remark about nuisance calls. He could have done that. She wouldn't have believed him. She never believed him, not now. Whatever he said, she would know who the call was from. That it was from her. If he took the phone out, any casualness in his manner would have to be an act.

He felt anything but casual. He wasn't sufficiently confident in being able to assume nonchalance, he left the phone in his pocket. Trusting that their attempt at conversation was sufficient to disguise the audible drone. It would stop soon, the caller deflected to his ansaphone. He agonised over the eight buzzing ring cycles before a single beep, indicated the call had been diverted.

If she had heard, she didn't say anything.

"We haven't bought any antiques, perhaps we should go to Marlow, perhaps at the weekend? We could make a day of it and go the Dog and Badger for lunch."

"Oh, aren't you busy this weekend? That's unusual I was planning to have coffee with Monica in Wycombe."

"Another weekend then?"

So they continued, in silence, apparently intent on Dickinson's Real Deal.

That she could ring again, and quite likely would, was nerve wracking. There would be evidence on the phone already, a missed call, possibly an ansaphone message. He also thought he had heard the bamboo snap of a text. He needed to put the phone on silent, but could not be seen trying to do so surreptitiously. She would be even more suspicious. Possibly ask to see who had been calling. He was sure she had heard and just saying nothing, but he hoped he was wrong.

"I'm going to get a cup of tea, would you like one?"

Walking into the kitchen, not waiting for a response. He thought, that this could provide the opportunity. He could delete the missed call and any message, perhaps turn the phone off. Waiting, for the sound of the kettle being filled. She would have to go to the fridge to get milk. Then he saw, door to the kitchen, glazed with textured glass wasn't transparent, but she hadn't pulled it closed. At this moment the basis of all human fears, he thought. A closed door, slightly ajar. She could walk back in, at anytime and without giving the few seconds warning that opening the door would provide. Long enough to get his phone back in his pocket and to appear unconcerned when she came into the room. Of course, he would not look unconcerned, and she would see immediately what he had been doing. But, as usual, he allowed himself to believe it.