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Confession

by Sue Hitchcock

Declan had worked late on Friday evening and was trying to sleep a little longer, while Margie seemed to be playing the 1812 overture on the pots and pans.

“In heaven’s name, Margie, what’s all the noise about?”

“Aren’t we going to see Roma today?”

“Later, later.” His eyes closed, hopefully.

“But we could go now.”

“Why don’t you phone her and ask her when she finishes work?”

Declan managed another twenty minutes before she bothered him again.

“She doesn’t finish till three. I can’t wait till then.”

“We can set out at one and have lunch there. Why don’t you go and buy her some flowers at Lidl and take Bobby and get some dog food while you’re there. Here’s my card and bring the receipt.”

When they arrived the pub was busy, now it was nearly summer which had been looked forward to so keenly during the Covid lockdown. Margie had wearied herself with anticipation, waiting with her head in her hands. Roma came to take their order as if they were strangers, but Margie’s eyes closed with pleasure as Roma slid her hand under her ponytail and stroked the nape of her neck.

“He’s watching. He knows you are here, so be good or he’ll ask you to leave.”

Declan sneered and the meal, under surveillance was as tasteless as cardboard, but at last it was three o’clock and Bobby barked a greeting to her dog, Ruby, before Roma came in sight.

“Come on, let’s get off the premises, so we can talk.”

The dogs chased round each other, friends reunited. The girls touched each other, the ways girls do, holding hands, admiring new trainers, straightening a neckline, smoothing back wind-blown hair, teasing and barging each other harmlessly. It seemed so right, but Declan was thinking about solutions.

The barge was leaning over onto the path, despite her shallow keel and it was an uphill climb across the deck to the hatch. Inside was dark and smelled of stagnant creek water. Roma and Declan retreated, but Margie shouted “Wimps!” and descended to the bilge pump and started work. It was folly as the tide was beginning to rise.

Declan and Roma sat in the sun at the prow.

“It’s pretty dire. It needs a lot of work.”

“I’m saving as much as I can, but my friend Ted, the chandler reckons it would need a crane.”

“Hmmm.” Declan tried to picture it. “What about you? Can you stand living at the pub?”

At this Roma hesitated. Then she took a deep breath, “I have a confession to make. I felt grateful when he didn’t have me charged for breaking and entering, but how long do I have to keep paying back? I have to confess, it’s not the first time I’ve used sex to get what I wanted, but this doesn’t end. In fact it’s getting worse. I feel like his slave.”

“I see how possessive and controlling he is. Doesn’t his wife object? “

“She would, if she knew, but that is another part of it, hiding it from her.”

“You don’t have to live there. You could live with us. We’ve even got Granny’s old van you could do up.”

“But I couldn’t keep an eye on the barge. It would be gone before I knew it, and it’s my only hope of independence. Look, you won’t tell Margie about all this, will you?”

“No, but I am a bit ashamed of you and I think, as a traveller, you should have more pride. I’ll help you as much as I can, if only for Margie.”