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I Divorce Thee

by Lesley Dawson

Coming home early and expecting his lunch to be on the table, he found an empty house. Restraining himself from throwing anything against the wall, he took his mobile out of his pocket, dialing the number of the local church hall.

“Where are you?” he demanded as his wife answered his call.

“You knew I was coming to help organize the stalls for the Autumn Fair. That was the last thing I said to you before you left this morning.”

“I expect you to be here to feed me. This is what a good wife should do.”

“Come on. I know you can make yourself something to eat. You used to cook elaborate meals for our friends when we lived in Bethlehem.”

All this fuss had started after Jad had returned from Saudi Arabia, having been on the Haj. He was now a much more observant Muslim than he had been when they married and expected much more obedience from his wife.

Over the years she had pushed her own Christian beliefs to the back of her mind and resigned herself to doing what he wanted and raising their son as a good Muslim. Their son was now away at university and had made it clear he wanted nothing to do with the religion of either of his parents. She now felt able to pick up the threads of her own faith and become more involved in the local Anglican church.

Rushing back home to prepare his lunch did not improve his mood and he came out with a statement she had been expecting, dreading and hoping for, all at the same time.

“I think I would like a divorce.”

Trying to decide if this confession made her sad or glad, she nodded wisely.

“OK. Do you want me to tell our son and my family? I assume you will communicate this change to your family in Gaza?”

Obviously surprised at the way she had accepted this plan and shocked at how quickly she was taking practical steps to further his desire to be rid of her, he mumbled something about them needing to think about things more before they told anyone else, he escaped to his office and the subject was not mentioned again for the rest of the week.

Despite the fact that his lips were now sealed, Jane had the bit between her teeth and notified all her family and friends. Jad began to receive emails from these folks saying how sorry they were and that they would remain friends with both parties. He realized she had taken him at his word, and he was not sure he had really meant what he said. Nor was sure he wanted to go ahead.

Jane took advice from Andrew, her vicar, who had worked in Egypt for a number of years and seemed to understand how Arab men thought. After Evensong a month later, she raised the subject of the divorce again.

“Jad, I realise that you think that I have not been a good wife to you recently. If you remember, when you asked me to marry you, I said I was willing to take on your Arab Muslims culture, but I would not forsake my Christian faith”

He nodded, remembering his pursuit of this woman and his family’s rejection of her until Ahmed was born.

“Also, I hope that you haven’t forgotten our agreement that when Ahmed was old enough to understand, I would be free to attend Sunday services at church.”

“You’re trying to tell me something.”

“Sadly enough. I am. And it sounds in my ears like an apology. I hope it is not”

“I am going to set out lunch.”