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## Roma Leaves Conyer

by Sue Hitchcock

Declan found himself in the wrong place. It had been a long day driving around, but he really shouldn't have taken the turning by the water tower, which led to Walderslade. It was the next one that went to Wigmore where his last delivery was. After a tiresome three point turn, he completed his day's work somewhat late. Roma had been on his mind ever since she had confessed that she paid in kind, by sexual favours, for debts she felt she owed. Roma was a lovely woman and should have more self-esteem. The women Declan knew promised much, but gave little. What Roma needed was someone who adored her, just as Margie did, but that was just a schoolgirl crush, wasn't it?

"Margie? You would like it if Roma stayed here with us, wouldn't you?"

"It was me who suggested it."

"Let's keep on at her, till she does."

Margie made one of those teenage sounds, meaning it was already happening and obvious to anyone with their brain switched on.

"I'll fork out for new mattresses, if you give Gran's van a clean out."

"Yay!"

They sneaked into the pub the following Saturday.

"What are you doing here?"

Toby was aghast to find Roma had brought her two scruffy friends up to her room.

Margie began to scream abuse at him, till Declan put his hand over her mouth. “Roma can speak for herself.”

There was a second of expectation, Roma placing a few more items carefully in her rucksack then she raised her head, “Toby, I’m leaving. Don’t think I’m not grateful for your help, but I can’t carry on like this. What am I? – a skivvy, a slave, your bit on the side? Jean is bound to find out and that could be another kettle of fish.”

A voice from outside on the landing, “or maybe she knew all along, you bastard, Toby!”

Jean didn’t care as much as she should have. She had half shares in the pub and made sure she had other friends to have fun with. Toby’s traditional view of the different roles of men and women had lingered long after the reality had changed.

“Roma, you’ve been a great help, but it’s time you went. I can’t say I’m sorry, but good, go!”

Jean dragged her dumbstruck husband away and Roma collapsed in laughter.

Declan carried the rucksack and a black plastic bag of Roma’s things to the car, while Margie took her friend around the waist to hurry her to Declan’s car, the one he had painted with flames, now to rocket her away, home.