

The Missing Peace

by Chandra Fifield

“Did your parents not do puzzles with you as a child?” he sneered.

Rosa, crestfallen, cast her eyes downwards to escape his glare. Her shoulders slumped further, shrinking into her silhouette as she made herself as small as she could. It was as if her body instinctively knew to recoil from the searing heat of her husband’s derisiveness.

It was horrible when Ted was like this. They stood opposite each other, polarised in the icy drawing room of their Georgian villa. Rosa had always felt uncomfortable here and dreaded the holiday season, when Ted insisted they jaunted off to the Isle of Wight for vacation.

Sparsely furnished and painted white, the layout of the house was split by a thin, steep staircase of bare exposed wood. A white strip painted crudely down the middle of each step gave the whole thing a shabby chic appeal. It wasn’t intentional - Rosa wasn’t allowed to be involved in the decorating choices - but it reminded her of the style all the same.

She knew every creak and cranny of that staircase. Where best to place her feet so as not to weigh too heavily on the ageing wood, which could betray her to her cost; noisily announcing her arrival to Ted.

Rosa had become an expert at making herself small. Ted was so hard to please, it was if everything she did quickened him to anger. Or disdain. Her whole life was spent walking on eggshells to appease her husband and keep him from displeasure. It was becoming harder and harder for Rosa to find her way back into his good books and she felt fraught from it. And utterly exhausted.

“So, as I was saying,” Ted picked up again, the deep brown of his eyes flashed almost black with malevolence. Rosa remembered years ago when those same eyes glinted a myriad of golden autumnal hues. She had marvelled at how the sunlight danced off irises that glimmered and fixed on her with such warmth and love. But that was years ago. That was before.

“It genuinely baffles me Rosa,” Ted continued, “you’re an intelligent woman, you have a degree in the sciences. Yet somehow, some-how...” Ted drew out the word for dramatic effect, as if building up to a crescendo of utter disbelief. “Somehow you still fail to grasp even the most basic concept of logic. A three year-old could do better.”

That was the sucker-punch for Rosa. Ted knew that anything he said about their infant son would hit her with such visceral force, it was worse than any other punishment meted out by him. And after nine years, there had been plenty.

Drawing herself up, she fixed her eyes on her husband and coolly replied, “crime is common. Logic is rare.”

Spurred on by a flurry of adrenaline and her heart pounding, Rosa sharply exited the cold drawing room and a dumbfounded Ted. She had never answered back before. It felt exhilarating, but she knew there would be a price to pay.

Clutching her keys she’d scooped off the sideboard, Rosa fumbled at the front door lock, trembling hands grappling with the task. The heavy thud of footsteps quickened behind her as she tried to steady her shaking fingers.

Finally, the key connected into the cylinder and the door was released. Rosa turned to look at Ted, his face contorted in rage, storming towards her, closer still. She could feel his breath on her cheek.

Suddenly a silhouette appeared outside the front door; someone tall, wearing a cap. “Delivery,” the spectre trilled, its outline advancing towards the entrance. A hand, outstretched, turned the door knob. “Thank goodness you’re here,” Rosa giddily exclaimed, greeting the confused courier like he was a long lost friend.