

BABY COME BACK

Mary woke to sounds, loud like shattering glass. It was perfectly dark in the guest bedroom where she slept. The blackout drapes kept it dark, the solid walnut door kept out most sounds. If the sound was breaking glass it didn't set off the burglar alarm. *Had they remembered to arm the alarm last night? Something happened, but what?*

She reached for the lamp, fumbled to find the switch, and twisted it. She stood and grabbed her glasses from the night stand. Another sound. Her husband was calling her name. *Oh no something has happened to Sam.* She jerked open the door and hurried across the hall into their master bedroom. She flicked on the light. "Sam, where are you?"

"Mary, I'm in the bathroom. I fell."

"Oh, no!" she cried, as she rushed to him. Mary dropped to her knees and cradled his face in her hands. "Oh, darling, your head is bleeding! Are you ok? What happened?"

"Just a minute, let me see if I can get up."

"Honey, how did this happen?"

"I fell and hit my forehead."

Oh God, she thought, I should have been in our bed with him. I would have heard him fall. What if I hadn't heard him at all?

For forty years, she had worn earplugs, or covered her ears with her pillow to block the sounds from the tv. She had pulled blankets over her eyes countless times to block the light from his reading lamp.

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Mary never told Sam how hard it was for her to go to sleep and she never asked him to consider her preferences. She feared she might start an argument which would eventually drive him away.

Why didn't he ever ask her if the light or the tv bothered her? She wanted him to ask. But she was willing to put up with a little discomfort for her husband's happiness. She loved him and wanted to be a good wife.

But one night she'd had enough. She got out of their bed, walked to the guest bedroom, and crawled under the comforter. It had been one bright noisy night too many. She chose dark quiet sleep, alone.

One night became a second, a third, a week, a month. After their good night kiss each night they walked to separate bedrooms for sleep.

He asked her many times to come back to their bed, but she said no, thinking it would only mean going back to covering her eyes and ears, and she now preferred a solid night's sleep.

But now his fall, his call for help. What if she hadn't heard him? She tenderly daubed his forehead with a wet washcloth.

He pushed himself up to sit. They both knew she couldn't help him stand. Her 110 pounds was no match for his 220.

"You can't help me with this, Mary, but I can stand up. Bring the shower chair over here for me to lean on. He pushed up against the chair and balanced with the toilet seat. He stood. She brought his cane to support him as he walked back to the bed.

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“Rest a little, then we’ll go to urgent care,” she said.

Mary drove him to the 24-hour urgent care facility where he received five stitches above his left eye and glue to close a cut on his eyelid. They waited together in the examination room for results of the CT scan.

Sam turned to Mary and took her hand, “Baby, please come back to our bed, I’ll be quiet, no more tv, no more reading in bed. I will be considerate of your needs, I promise.”

She giggled. He reminded her of a begging puppy. She should call him Spot, with his black eye and stitches tracing across his forehead.

“I was thinking the same thing, Sam, we need to sleep in the same bed.”

She knew she would go back even without his big promises. Her place was near Sam in case something bad happened again. But there was more on her mind. She felt so lonely every day, as though a part of her was missing. She hoped to feel whole again when they were once again in the same bed every night. Forty years was a long time.

But it would be different this time. She would speak up if he went back to his old habits. She really would.

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