

A QUIET, EMPTY LIFE

by

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(A woman, STEPHANIE, enters, half dressed. She approaches a dresser and pulls out articles of clothing, looking them over, comparing them to one another, trying to make a decision. Her mood is somber, and she appears almost to be sleepwalking. She will find clothes to try on, reject, try more and ultimately get dressed by the end.

Lights come up on a man sitting at a desk. He observes Stephanie for a moment, then turns and looks out at the audience.)

NARRATOR

Stephanie was not a very political person. Her days did not revolve around the big questions that preoccupied the minds of political leaders and thinkers like, “How can we bring about peace between all people?” or “How can we live in a manner that affords us the luxuries of modern times, but which does not result in harm to the natural world?”

Stephanie lived with her husband Carl and their twin eight year-old boys in a quiet town far from those larger concerns. Her days were mainly spent worrying about smaller matters like “How can I protect my children from internet porn?” and “When did orange juice get so expensive?”

This afternoon Stephanie found herself standing in her bedroom, pondering a very different question, trying to figure out what to wear. Normally, she wouldn't be faced with a decision like this on a Saturday, but today she had a special function to attend, one that she couldn't get out of, though secretly she longed to. Everyone from the neighborhood would be there, and she wanted to look right.

Stephanie liked to say she lived in a gated community without the gate. Actually, she and Carl had purchased a modest

NARRATOR (CONT.)

home in a real estate development not far from the highway that cut through this part of the state. You couldn't see the highway, but you could hear the hum of the trucks tires as they made their way north and south, delivering goods.

Their house was at the end of a cul-de-sac, and though she didn't know the term, Stephanie felt it's grip.

STEPHANIE

I'm at a dead end.

NARRATOR

She told her therapist, referring to her job as a secretary in a law office. Her therapist said nothing, but merely wrote her a new prescription for anti-depressants. And though she took those pills every day – sometimes twice a day – she never really grasped that the lack of depression did not make her happy.

STEPHANIE

Every time I turn around, I'm still facing the same way.

NARRATOR

She would say as she left his office. That was simply how she felt. It wasn't that her life was hard. Carl was tender and attentive, her boys were wonderful, and she loved her garden. But for some reason there seemed to be a hole in the center of her chest.

And so she went on with her life as usual. She went to her job, picked up the twins Nick and Scott from school, and had dinner with them and Carl every night, and continued to feel empty.

Although not as empty as she had felt this past week. Not even a full week. It was Monday that her routine had been disrupted, and though she hated the routine, she knew it was the only thing that kept her moving forward most days.

Some afternoons when it was slow at the law office, Stephanie went online and googled the names of ex-boyfriends when she was supposed to be working. Ben Harris was now a

NARRATOR (CONT.)

contractor outside of Denver, and Mark Lyons wrote for an entertainment magazine. Stephanie suspected Mark was gay. They had only gone all the way once, and it had been a short and sad coupling. Sometimes she felt guilty for trying to find out about these old boyfriends, like she was betraying Carl. It was curiosity more than anything else that drove these inquiries, as she and Carl were very happy, and had rarely had any major arguments in ten years of marriage.

Stephanie had not been at work for the past week, however, and the twins had been home from school. Thankfully, her mother had driven in to lend a hand with things. And now as she stood in front of her closet, Stephanie thought as she often did that she had no good clothes to wear.

Stephanie didn't give much thought to her appearance, wearing the same kind of tops and slacks or blue jeans most days. In the summer she wore shorts that were a size too large, and which she pulled up too high on her waist, giving her a boxy look. It was a hold over from the hand-me-downs she inherited from her older, larger sisters as a child, and the shorts simply felt right.

But it wasn't summer. It was April, and it had been a cold, wet month at that. She would've preferred to wear slacks, but a skirt seemed more appropriate. Her instinct was to wear the black one, but Carl never liked that one, and the appliqué design on it seemed out of place. Carl liked the blue skirt she had, and, though it was a little shorter than she would've wanted, she put it on for him.

It wasn't that she didn't want to appear fashionable, but her mind just didn't think along those lines, and the styles of dress that other women wore simply never registered with her. Carl always said she looked good, but she knew he was being nice.

Carl was always being nice, and that drove her crazy. She couldn't stand the way he rolled with all the punches, and tried to find the positive in any bad turn of events. And it made her angry at herself that she felt that way. She knew

NARRATOR (CONT.)

Carl's attitude was better than hers, and that the worry and stress over things were bad for her health, while Carl's way of thinking was easier on the system. But she still couldn't understand how it never seemed to upset him when the twins went racing through the house, screaming as they chased each other, or when someone cut them off on the highway. These things sent her blood pressure soaring, and inwardly she cursed at the errant drivers and her own offspring, while Carl would always just smile and say, "Looks like someone's in a hurry."

She wondered over and over how he stayed so even keeled, wishing he'd get to the point where he'd be angry with her, and tell her to stop wasting her time and energy wallowing in depression and therapy, and instead learn to breathe and enjoy their lives together and the jubilant energy that Nick and Scott always seemed to possess.

But instead he always smiled and put his warm arms around her when she felt low, and said he would always be there for her. And that always made her feel even worse. And for the thousandth time that day, Stephanie thought about her husband's smile, and fought back her tears.

STEPHANIE

Why?

NARRATOR

She asked, wondering how something like this could happen in a safe place like Blacksburg, Virginia.

STEPHANIE

Why?

NARRATOR

Why? Why did that boy walk into my class room and shoot seven people dead. Leaving her alone with the twins to attend my funeral on this bright, but cool April afternoon.

STEPHANIE

Carl?

(Stephanie slowly turns and faces the narrator for the first time, seeing him, perhaps even reaching out to him.)

NARRATOR

And now that I'm gone and the boring, unfulfilling and empty routine of her wonderful, loving and ultimately oh-so blissfully happy life has been permanently destroyed, Stephanie has no idea who will tell her to breathe and enjoy life now.

(The Narrator slowly turns and walks away from Stephanie, not looking back, as the lights fade to black.)