

## Moonlight Misery

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The village slumbered still and silent in the tranquil quietude of winter's night, unaware that in their wakening, they would learn a shocking truth of the local butcher and of the innocent lives that was his intention to end.

Heavy darkened clouds drifted lethargically across an icy moon, not yet complete in its roundness. A rotund, silhouetted figure crept with cat-like caution from the house then disappeared with secreted intent into the garage.

Dressed in heavy woollen sweater and loose-fitting jeans, Tom grunted breathlessly as he leaned forwards to place a cardboard box down at his slippered-feet. His attention then turned to the house, his mind spiralling with tormented anguish as with wetted eyes he stared solemnly through the dusty glass to focus on the bedroom window where his two children slumbered innocently.

'God forgive me this night,' Tom sighed heavy-hearted. 'I have to get rid of them tonight.'

Touching a chubby-fingered hand over thinning hair, Tom was unable to stem the purl of sorrowful tears that rolled down puffed cheeks, his heart pounding with desperate guilt as he pondered the consequences of his intended actions.

'I\_\_ have no choice\_\_ God Almighty. If only there was another way. Damn, I just can't bloody cope anymore. They are growing up so fast.'

With heavy heart, Tom gripped thick fingers around the handle of the knife that lay on the workbench, swallowing hard at the lump that formed in his throat. There, he stood illuminated by the gentle glow of the watchful moon that seeped through the skylight, arms folded in anxious thought, his head bowed then with guilty sorrow as again he questioned his actions.

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‘We shouldn’t have had them in the first place. I bloody told her it was too soon,’ Tom groaned, slowly sliding the knife of the blade back and forth over the oiled sharpening stone. An icy chill thrust then up his spine as he touched a fingertip against the blade edge. Again, Tom wrestled with his conscience, the alcohol that he had earlier consumed destroying his ability to think properly, creating a falsehood in his own reasoning.

The silenced ambience of the moon-lit garage was interrupted by the unexpected rain as it spattered noisily onto the corrugated roofing, and constantly tapped against the window like tiny drumming fingers.

‘Maybe it would be better if I just killed myself instead,’ Tom grunted, removing piece of coiled rubber pipe from underneath the workbench, attaching one end then to the exhaust pipe of his car. ‘I can’t bloody believe this\_\_ please God, help me. Please forgive me for what I’m about to do,’ Tom continued, moistened eyes staring skyward then before slicing the knife through the carefully measured piece of pipe then attached the severed end at the passenger side door and secured it by winding up the window.

Tom rested muscular arms on top of the car roof, head bowed onto his forearms as he reflected on the past two years that had seen his wife, Emily, become paralysed following a horrific car crash. The steady decrease in trade as his customers tended to shop at the large supermarkets in town. His business then losing profits at an alarming rate causing him to sack the assistants, but worse, he had to let go of the housekeeper, who had cared for his wheelchair bound wife and the two young children.

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‘God, if\_\_ there was another way, anything other than this,’ Tom sobbed, his heart heavy as he decided to continue with his plans. ‘I really must get rid of the little ones tonight\_\_ I have to get rid of them.’

There, in the icy moonlit garage, Tom was startled by a noise outside. Seemingly frozen to the very spot, he stared wide-eyed at the slowly opening garage door. The shadowed figure of his wheelchair bound wife appeared before him, sending his entire body into a guilt-ridden surge of quivering nervousness.

‘Tom\_\_ Tom\_\_ what on earth are you doing?’ Emily quizzed, shivering underneath the raincoat that was pulled up over her head. ‘What are you doing out here in the dark?’ Emily continued, entering the garage to stare directly at her stunned husband. ‘What are you doing, Tom?’

The overhead fluorescent light buzzed noisily as it illuminated the chilled garage, Tom dropping the knife as he stood still, like a naughty schoolboy being caught by the headmaster. His mind raced anxiously as his eyes scanned back and forth between his confused wife and the hosepipe that was secured by the passenger door window.

‘Oh Emily\_\_ please forgive me,’ Tom sobbed heavily, his broad shoulders drooping with guilt as he then sank to his knees with shame. He buried his tear-stained face into his wife’ lap and gripped both her hands tightly as he continued to weep uncontrollably.

‘My God, what is it, Tom?’

‘I’m so sorry; I just can’t go on like this, Emily. I just can’t cope anymore.’

‘Come on, love, tell me what’s wrong,’ Emily said, gently stroking Tom’s head.

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