

THE COLD BREAKFAST

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One morning Mrs. Henry Taylor went upstairs to tell her husband breakfast was ready and found him dead - dead as the doorknob she turned to get into his room. She had a feeling he might be dead when she didn't hear him cough like he usually did.

She had not heard him snore for a decade. That's when they decided to sleep in separate rooms. He said he was tired of sharing a closet with her plus she disturbed him in the mornings. She was an early riser - always had been - early to bed, early to rise. He was the type that haunted the night. He would watch television until the national anthem played and read a book until dawn. This morning she looked at the calendar on the wall. It was ten years to the day since he retired from the firm.

She stood in the doorway of Henry's bedroom. He would go and do something like this - die before she did. What was she suppose to do now? She looked at his stiff body. She could tell he was dead because he was as white as a ghost. The veins that once protruded on his forehead seemed to have collapsed. His mouth stayed opened in the most hapless fashion.

She backed out of the room. She was not able to focus. She walked down the stairs, through the foyer, past the laundry piled on a chair in the living room, to the dinning room.

Then she sat across from Henry Taylor's cold breakfast. She looked down at her own breakfast. "Oh well," she thought, "Maybe he isn't dead." She hesitated and looked up at the ceiling. She heard something. No. Maybe not? It was an old house, built in another century. It often creaked and groaned with windy weather. She sat back on the chair and sighed deeply. Hanging on the wall just to her right was a family photograph. She turned her head a bit and squinted at the framed picture. She remembered that Henry complained all day about going and sitting for a professional photographer. "Why don't we just use the old Brownie? It still takes perfectly good pictures?" But, their son, Henry, Jr., insisted. So Mr. and Mrs. Taylor went with their son Henry.

Mrs. Taylor stared at the photograph. Standing in back were the two Henry's. Sitting in front of them was Mrs. Taylor and her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Taylor. A child sitting on the

young Mrs. Taylor's lap is Henry the third who goes by the nick-name Hank.

She took a sip of coffee, slurping it loudly. It was cold. Then she remembered why. She decided to be strong for once in her life and go right up there and tell Henry to get out of bed at once. She wanted him to abandoned this silly idea of dying and come down to breakfast. She went upstairs to her room and made her bed. She usually did it before she went down and made breakfast. But on this day she made breakfast first. She made the bed slowly and carefully. Then she dusted the vanity and the night stands.

She remembered when they married. She was eighteen years old and he was thirty-five. Mr. Taylor had been her math teacher in high school. Even now after so many years his presents in the house gave her a sense of well being. He was comfortable in the world and she hoped she had contributed to that comfort.

She sat on the bed, still wearing her house dress. Hugging a pillow she prayed for Mr. Taylor to snore. There had been times she found his snoring annoying but today, oh dear God, today she would welcome it. She was suspended in time. The slowly moving sun had no affect on her. She didn't rush around to see what needed laundered. She didn't check where her husband sat in the large chair in the living room to see if it needed dusting. Then she thought of the newspaper. The newspaper was outside next to the front door. She smiled and breathed in the crisp winter air. The paper was more often than not on the lawn or the sidewalk. She took the rubber band off and slipped it over the doorknob. Her hands felt cold. She put the newspaper on the table next to her husband's chair. What ever news was printed on those pages was insignificant. She was use to Henry reading the paper first. Her favorite part of the paper was the society page and Dear Abbie. Was he dead?

She began to wonder if this was a practical joke. She tried to convince herself that he was doing this to tease her. But what a strange thought. He never teased her or played jokes. He was a quiet serious man. She wondered how different their life may have been if he teased and played jokes. It was mid day.

Mrs. Taylor vacuumed the family room and washed down the kitchen walls. The phone rang. She ran to the foot of the steps to get the phone before it stopped ringing. Mr. Taylor refused to allow another phone in the house.

"Hello, Hello," she said, out of breath.

"Mom?"

"Oh Henry, how are you son? Is it still snowing out there?"

"Not today but there sure has been a lot in the last few weeks."

"Yes, I know, I watch all the weather reports on T.V. How's Hank?" She took a breath. . Mr. Taylor was disappointed in his son. He thought his namesake did not take life seriously enough. He took art classes and smoked marijuana before marrying this girl who dabbled in feminism. She may as well have been a witch to Mr. Taylor. He thought the couple was far too lenient with his grandson, Hank.

"Hank's fine mom. Did you hear Sarah? She just said hello from the garage. How's dad?"

There was a long silence. It was so long that Henry said, "Mom, Mom, are you still there?"

How would she tell him? Then she decided to say, "Son your father isn't snoring any more."

"Snoring? Mom you know your hearing is getting bad. Hey, Sarah's pregnant again. We're going to name the baby after you if it's a girl. Yep. I have great parents even though you two seem to be from the dark ages. Hey, I'm going to call one of those environmental groups and have them put a sign on your front door that says, endangered species. Why, Sarah's out there right now fixing the car. And I am man enough to clean the kitchen.

"Nell. That's what will name the new baby. Isn't that what you said your mother called you when you were small. Do you remember telling me that?"

She remembered. She remembered her mother fixing her hair in bows and she remembered the little white gloves her mother made for her and her mother's face. She must not cry. She must be strong and tell her son his father is dead! He wouldn't be able to fly out right away. When she hung up, she thought she would call Joyce. Joyce was the only person in the world who didn't refer to her as Mrs. or Mother. Even Mr. Taylor called her Mother. She could see his breakfast on

the table from where she sat.

"Your father didn't come down to eat breakfast, Henry." She tried again.

"Oh mom. He's so finicky. He just seems to get worse as he gets older. You shouldn't be so sensitive. He's a lost breed. If I treated Sarah like he treats you, she'd of divorced me long ago."

"Son - I think..."

"Listen Mom I'll call ya next week. We're on our way to the slopes. You should see your grandson ski. I'd invite you and Dad out to ski with us some time but I know how you hate leaving home. I think you would rather sit and watch T.V. Ha ha ha. Just kidding- but hey, try to tear yourselves away from home this year to visit us. We have a T.V. too. Boy, what a pair you two are. Well, better go. Love ya mom."

"Henry your father is dead." Mrs. Taylor said - too late the dial tone buzzing loudly in her ear.

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