

THE ACCIDENTAL HUSBANDS

by Gloria Burgess

Winner – 50+

It was never my intention to kill my husband, well not at first. In the beginning, I just wanted to make him suffer a little, you know, a sprinkling of rat poison here, a drop of anti-freeze there. It was during his hospitalisation from his latest bout of stomach trouble, I realised how liberating it was to live on my own, to be able to do exactly what I want to do, go where I want to go, eat when I want eat and not have to concern myself with someone else's needs.

I was brought up to believe marriage was for ever and that you just got on with it whatever 'You make your bed, you lie on it'. Oh, I knew that the giddy early days of matrimony were not going to last forever, but I didn't realise how short-lived it would be. I soon found myself stuck in a boring, stagnant relationship and I couldn't help but wonder, 'Is this really what I signed up for?' Maybe I should have read the small print on the marriage licence. I decided that I could no longer lie on my 'made bed', it was time to get up.

I cannot remember when my resentment of him turned into hate, it just crept up on me. Everything he did annoyed me, the way he left his wet towel on the bed, his dirty clothes on the bathroom floor, his expectation I would clean up after him, which I did. The way he picked wax from his ear with the car key, the way he talked with his mouth full, choking as he guffawed like a donkey at his own stupid jokes, snoring in the chair with his mouth open. The times I had been tempted to drop something furry with eight legs into the gaping hole. All the small things that I put up with over time escalated into

big things. It got to a point where I just couldn't imagine spending the rest of my life with him, what's left of it that is. He had to go.

Poisoning had been my first choice as a long- term solution, but that could be risky. The dosage might not be high enough, he might survive and I could end up being a nursemaid. The trial doses had just made him sick for a couple of days, but if I did it for real it had to work with certainty, no complications. I am not the 'cricket-bat- over- the- head' type of person, could take too many whacks to do the job, so I had to think of something that was quick, no mess and looked like an accident.

I do not know how long I stood there watching, it seemed ages, but I had read that it would be over in seconds, the current passing through the body at speed and making a pit-stop at the heart.

The Police were very sympathetic and I portrayed an Oscar worthy performance of the grieving widow, complete with tear soaked handkerchief. Well I had been rehearsing for days. Do you know how hard it is to cry on cue? It takes a lot of practice. The coroner declared his death an accident, electrocution caused by the electric heater falling off the wall into the bath water..... with a little help from me of course, but I thought it best not to mention it. The insurance company paid out in full.

The house was sold and I bought a small apartment which was both practical and economical. It allowed me to treat myself to a Mediterranean cruise, an expensive makeover and a wardrobe of new clothes to go with the new me. I practised walking in high heels, very high heels (he would not let me wear them as he thought them tarty) and I even bought myself a car and signed up for driving lessons. I was living a life I had

dreamed of for so long, a merry widow and they didn't come merrier than me, life was good, that is until I met husband number two.

I know, you are wondering why on earth I would marry again after spending time and effort to get unmarried from husband number one. Why would I want to give up my freedom, tie myself down to another man especially as I was living the life I always wanted? Well, freedom is all well and good but it can be lonely, especially for a middle-aged woman and of course there is the financial motive. The life insurance I received for husband number one was running out fast and I needed some financial security as well replenishing my dwindling bank account.

I met husband number two, who I shall call H2 to avoid confusion, on one of my cruises. For the remainder of the holiday we enjoyed each other's company and he treated me like a princess, pity that in the coming months my prince would turn into a frog.

H2 had been widowed for five years, had no children or any living relatives, was successful in business, owned his house, and lived a comfortable life. Why wouldn't I want some of that? After the holiday, we continued to see each other. He took me out to fancy restaurants, spoilt me with gifts of perfume, jewellery and flowers and I must admit I enjoyed being courted. Courtied, is that word too old fashioned to use these days? Anyhow, three months later we decided to marry, well it sounded alright at the idea stage, I thought I had met my Mr Right, but I didn't realise his first name was 'Always.'

The wedding was a simple registry office affair, witnesses were people we pulled in off the street and the reception was a meal at the nearby Italian restaurant, just the two of us. After that there was no more going out for meals, no more gifts, no social life, no friends, I was well and truly deceived. At his insistence, I sold my apartment and moved

into the house he had shared with his wife and before I knew it he took control of everything, especially the finances which included the money from the sale of my apartment. I was given a housekeeping allowance and anything extra I had to ask him for, which resulted in the Spanish Inquisition on, Why? What for? and Do I really need it? Oh, I did remind him that some of the money in the account was mine, but he condescendingly told me he was the best person to care for it as he was used to handling money, not like me who, *is inexperienced in the world of financial matters and not to worry my pretty little head about such things.* The pompous ass.

His controlling did not stop at money matters. I was not allowed to move anything in the house, it had to remain the same as it did when his wife Madge was alive. I even had to put up with framed photos of her staring out at me from the various highly polished surfaces. It was as if she was checking on my every move. I'm sure I saw her shake her head and tut in disapproval when I spilled water on the sideboard as I topped up a vase of flowers. I wondered if on the occasions that we had sex he saw Madge's face instead of mine. Sex, now that is another thing, our sex life was organised and factored into his Filofax. Every two weeks on Mondays and Thursdays, perish the thought that it could be spontaneous. A time and place for everything and everything in its place. If this was not bad enough he continually compared me to his dead wife," Madge always changed the bed sheets every Friday", "Madge always put a pinch of mixed herbs in her meat and potato pie", "Madge's fruit cake was to die for". Well mister you just might be doing that very soon, but it won't be with fruit cake.

It was six months into the marriage that I had finally decided he had to go. He just wanted a Madge Mk 2, someone to be his housekeeper, to care for him and his

mausoleum of a house. Well not me. The question was how to do it? To lose one husband to electrocution is an accident, to lose two is suspicious.

The idea came to me after reading an article on Death Cap mushrooms and how they can be confused with the safe ones. One ounce, it said, is all it takes to kill someone and it would be difficult to prove whether the poisoning was intentional or accidental.

Fool-proof poison, I like.... yes, I like very much.

The next morning armed with a basket, a fungi identification chart and a spring in my step, I set off for the woods, but not before I kissed H2 goodbye.

Goodbye dear husband, goodbye.